

חֲמֵשׁ מִגִּילוֹת
FIVE MEGILLOTH
—
PHILIP BIRNBAUM

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מִתְּרַגְּמוֹת וּמְפָרְשׁוֹת מֵאֵת
פֶּלְטֵי אֵל בִּירְנְבָאִים

Translated and Annotated
by
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FIVE MEGILLOTH

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INTRODUCTION

I

SONG OF SONGS

The five biblical books which are known as the *Five Megilloth* (Scrolls) are recited in the synagogue, as part of the liturgy, on the following special occasions: the Song of Songs on Pesah; Ruth on Shavuoth; Lamentations on Tish'ah b'Av, the fast day commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem, first by the Babylonians in 586 before the common era, and then by the Romans in the year 70. Ecclesiastes is recited on Sukkoth, and Esther on Purim. In the Hebrew Bible, the *Five Megilloth*, forming a class by themselves, are arranged according to the sequence of the aforementioned annual occasions.

In the past nineteen centuries, the allegorical method of interpretation has been applied to the Song of Songs in Jewish tradition. It has been accepted as an allegory of the relations between God and the people of Israel. Rabbi Akiva, who suffered martyrdom in the year 132, declared the Song of Solomon to be the holiest of all the sacred poetical writings.

The virtue of an allegory is that it leads the reader to think for himself, since its characters and actors are veiled representations, implied but not stated. Indeed, the Bible as a whole is believed to possess no single definitive meaning. Its very multiplicity of meanings results in its universal appeal, and marks it a continually relevant book. Some see in the Song of Songs an inspired portrayal of ideal human love, a description of the sacred married union.

According to the paraphrase of the Targum, the poem portrays the history of the Jewish people. Some interpreters took it

to be the story of the author's love for a country maiden, whom he raised to the rank of a queen. Another opinion, which has won wide acceptance among students of the Bible, contends that the Song of Songs contains a collection of love songs, suitable for marriage festivities.

The Song of Songs has been referred to as a gem of literature, a treasury of word and thought for the mystic's vocabulary. It is reckoned among the books known as the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, even though it contains no direct teaching, as in the case of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some interpreters have understood the Song of Songs as an admonition to a married couple to love each other. Several excerpts follow:

"I hear the voice of my beloved! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills! My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer. There he stands, behind the wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. . .

"My beloved called and said to me: Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. For, lo, the winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of song has come. . .

"On my bed at night I looked for him whom my soul loves. I asked the watchmen: Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I left them than I found him. I held him and would not let go of him until I had brought him into my mother's house. . .

"I was asleep, but my heart was awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking. . . I opened to my beloved, but he had turned away and was gone. I searched for him, but could not find him; I called him, but he did not answer. . . My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the flowerbeds of balsam, to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and he is mine. . . How beautiful you are, how pleasing, my love, my delight. . .

"Come, let us go into the fields, let us stay in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards, to see whether the grapevine has budded, whether the vine blossoms have opened, whether the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give my love to you. . .

"Love is strong as death itself; its flashes are flashes of fire, a flame of the Lord. Floods cannot quench love, rivers cannot drown it. If a man offered all his wealth for love, he would be

utterly scorned. . . Make haste, my beloved! Be like a gazelle, or like a young deer, on the mountains of spices."

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים, the Songs of Songs, is an exquisitely beautiful poem, replete with fascinating words and picturesque expressions. Its author carries us along with him into the vineyards, the hills, the villages. He awakes us at daybreak to catch the scent of the forest trees, to gather the apples and the pomegranates, to listen to the plash of falling waters. His verse is fragrant with the breath of spring.

II

R U T H

The book of Ruth is recited in the synagogue on Shavuoth, the harvest festival commemorating the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, because the scene of its story is the harvest field and, too, its leading character, Ruth, embraces Judaism.

Ruth's impassioned declaration of her true-hearted affection for Naomi, her mother-in-law, is one of the most beautiful passages in the book: "Entreat me not to leave you and to turn back from following you; wherever you go, I will go; wherever you stay, I will stay; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God; wherever you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord punish me time and again if anything but death parts me from you!"

The book of Ruth takes its name from Ruth who clung to Naomi with all the unselfishness of true-hearted affection. The narrative is one of idyllic beauty. It is the most charming short story in the Bible. It presents a pleasing picture of life in Eretz Yisrael during the period of the Judges, about two generations before King David. Approximately two-thirds of the narrative is in dialogue. The principal characters of the story are amiable, courteous, unassuming. They all show how a religious spirit may pervade the conduct of daily life.

The contents of the book of Ruth are well known. Naomi is an example of faithfulness and loyalty, self-sacrifice and moral integrity. Widowed and bereft of her two sons, Naomi returned to

Bethlehem, Judah, from the land of Moab, where they had lived during a famine in their own country. Anxious to provide for Ruth and to see her married, she successfully arranged the marriage of Ruth to Boaz, ancestor of King David. The book is primarily concerned to trace the ancestry of David. It appears to show that the principle of divine reward for good deeds is valid for all nationalities.

Interesting is the significance of names in Naomi's family. Their derivations are as follows: Naomi, *pleasant*; Elimelech, *my God is King*; Mahlon, *sickly*; Chilion, *wasting away*; Orpah, *turning away*; Ruth, *friend*; Boaz, *fleet*.

When the three men had died in Moab, where Mahlon had married Ruth, a Moabite maiden, she left her native land and accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. While glean- ing in the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi's deceased husband, she made a good impression on him and he took a liking to her. Custom required a relative of Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband, to marry Ruth. Boaz took her to wife after the refusal of one nearer of kin. By this marriage, Ruth became an ancestress of David. This was not a levirate marriage, since Boaz was not a brother of Ruth's deceased husband. According to custom, when the widow of a childless man desired to sell his estate, in the absence of a brother, the nearest of kin and heir to the husband was to buy or redeem it of the widow. The property was thereby retained in the family. Simultaneously, the kinsman voluntarily assumed levirate duties by marrying the widow. This was considered a mark of loyalty to the family. A son born of such union was legally the son of the deceased.

The contents of the book in outline are as follows: 1) Naomi returns to her native town, Bethlehem, with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth; 2) Ruth glean- s in the field of Naomi's wealthy kinsman Boaz; 3) Ruth appeals to Boaz to perform the part of a kinsman-redeemer; 4) Ruth is married to Boaz and gives birth to Oved; 5) geneology from Perez to David. The book thus supplies a family tree for the greatest of the kings of Jewish history. It contains a humanitarian plea on behalf of the childless widow, so that the next of kin would assume responsibility for her.

It has been pointed out that simplicity characterizes alike

the noblest and the loveliest poems. There are no better examples of this than the books of Ruth and Esther. There is not a phrase, an image, an accident, too much or too little in either; not a false note of atmosphere or feeling.

Excerpt: "At mealtime Boaz said to her: Come here and eat some of our food; dip your slice of bread in the vinegar. So she sat beside the harvesters, and he handed her roasted grains. . . Boaz married Ruth, and she bore him a son. Then the women said to Naomi: Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a kinsman. May the boy's name be renowned in Israel. . ."

The book of Ruth, depicting scenes amid felicities of Jewish home life in a pastoral age, shares with the book of Jonah the distinction of expressing the most charitable attitude toward non-Jews. In Jonah, the divine mercy is portrayed as universal: God spared heathen Nineveh, including "more than 120,000 human beings, who do not know their right hand from their left, and much cattle."

III

LAMENTATIONS

The author of *Lamentations* is named nowhere in the book. Tradition, however, credits the writing of the book to Jeremiah, of whom it is written: "Jeremiah composed an elegy over Josiah, and the singers, both men and women, all spoke of Josiah in their lamentations, as indeed they do to this day, for they made it a regular custom in Israel; they are written in the [book of] lamentations." (ויקון ירמיהו על יאשיהו, ויאמרו כל השרים והשרות) בקינותיהם על יאשיהו עד היום, ויתנום לחק על ישראל, והנם כתובים בקינות — II Chronicles 35:25). Josephus has transmitted this tradition, stating: "But all the people mourned greatly for him. . . and Jeremiah the prophet composed an elegy to lament him, which is extant till this time" (*Antiquities* 10:5,1).

This tradition is found in the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 15a) as well as in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Bible, which begins the book as follows: "After Israel was carried into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremias sat down and

wept, and sang this song of woe over Jerusalem. . .” Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, but this has no connection with the book of Lamentations.

The theme of the five elegies, or lamentation, is the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, with dreadful sufferings to its defenders. In various places the Jewish state is personified, bemoaning its hard fate; or else, the author who is believed to be Jeremiah, speaks in the first person as representing the Jewish nation.

Chanted in the synagogue on Tish‘ah b’Av, the ninth of Av, which commemorates the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple, the five anonymous poems are for the most part alphabetic acrostics, that is, the first four elegies. The fifth poem consists of twenty-two verses, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The purpose of an acrostic is to aid memorization. This carefully wrought, artificial style seems to have a further purpose, that of conveying completeness of grief, confession of sin, and perennial hopefulness.

The first lament depicts Zion as a onetime populous city now standing in solitude, as a poor widow. Her former friends and allies have become her enemies. Pilgrims no longer travel the roads leading to Jerusalem. The second lament depicts Zion’s sorrow due to God’s anger. The poet sheds tears at the sight of famished children in the city squares.

The third lament begins with the verse, “I am the man who has seen affliction,” expressing a yearning for hope: “The Lord is good to those who trust in him. . . It is good to wait in silence for the Lord’s help. . . The Lord does not reject forever. Even though he causes grief, he has mercy in his abundant kindness” (3:25-33).

The fourth lament contains a description of the besiegers, tightening their stranglehold, and a denunciation of Edom, who shall indeed drink of the cup of divine wrath. Zion has already received punishment for her sins. Edom’s turn shall be next.

The fifth and concluding poem contains Zion’s prayer for mercy: “Our pursuers were swifter than the vultures of the air; they hunted us on the hills, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness. Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; look on and see our disgrace! Our heritage has been turned over to strangers; we have

become orphans and are fatherless. . . Slaves rule over us; there is none to free us from their power. . . Restore us, O Lord, and let us return to thee. Renew our days as of old."

IV

ECCLESIASTES

It has been said that there is nothing grander than the book of Ecclesiastes in its impassioned survey of mortal pain and pleasure, its estimate of failure and success; none of more noble sadness; no poem working more indomitably for spiritual illumination. As one of the Five Megilloth (scrolls) belonging to the third division of the Hebrew Bible, known as *Kethuvim*, *Koheleth* (Ecclesiastes) is recited in the synagogue on the eighth day of the *Sukkoth* festival.

Koheleth counsels patience, endurance and discretion, and gives expression to the theory that history and nature move in a circle, an ever-revolving and recurring circle. A sense of futility and pessimism is displayed throughout the book, which deals with the pursuit of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and evil-doing. Upon examining the value of wisdom, wealth and pleasure, Koheleth finds life unsatisfying. He declares that wealth does not yield happiness, since it is often lost before it is enjoyed. At death, it is left to people who have not toiled to acquire it.

How are we to gain happiness? Shall we follow wisdom or unrestrained pleasure? Human existence is monotonous. There is nothing new in the entire world. We should therefore alternate wholesome work with reasonable pleasures of life while we can, since there is no telling when the end comes.

Here are a few maxims excerpted from Koheleth: "A lover of money will never be satisfied with his money. Sweet is the sleep of the worker, whether he eats much or little. But the surfeit of the rich man does not let him sleep. Naked he came from his mother's womb, and naked he must return; for all his toil, he has nothing to take with him. A good name is better than precious perfume.

"Let your garments be always spotless. Cast your bread upon the waters; after many days you shall find it. Sweet is the light of life; it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. Rejoice in your youth, young man. Remove all worries from your mind, and keep your body free from pain. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. . ."

In chapter one, Koheleth asserts that the course of nature does not change. Nothing is new, the present is like the past. This eternal sameness continues to be the quality of human existence. The wisdom man possesses does not alter his condition; it only deepens his sorrow by being aware of life's uselessness. In chapter two, Koheleth recalls his experiments with a variety of pleasures and joyous living. He has tasted all that could be regarded as good, denying himself nothing, and has come to the conclusion that there is no permanent value in all this. There is much to be said in praise of wisdom, but in the end the wise man dies, just as the fool does. Indeed, he does not gain more out of life than the fool does.

In chapter three, Koheleth mentions a variety of opposites in human existence: life and death, weeping and laughing, doing and not doing, there being a season for everything. God's plan seems to test men, who have no advantage over the beast. Both have the same fate: death and the return to dust. In chapter four, Koheleth speaks of oppression and the miseries of the oppressed. More fortunate are those who have not been born than those who have experienced the world's woes. Though it is foolish to abstain from work, successful toil produces envy among neighbors.

Chapter five: Be humble and listen. Do not talk much. Do not be surprised at corruption among officials, since all officials are encouraged by the example of those above them to make what gain they can from their vocations. Chapter six: At times, God bestows his gifts on a man who has not the power to enjoy them. Chapter seven: The spirit of levity becomes fools. The wise man feels himself more at home in the house of mourning than in the house of mirth. Like money, learning has a protective value. The wise man will avoid all extremes in conduct. . . Chapter 11: Take life as it is, grasping its opportunities, being neither too

fearful nor hesitant when decisions have to be made. Chapter 12: In your youth, while your vitality is yet unimpaired by the infirmities of age, remember your Creator.

V

ESTHER

The book of Esther, one of the most cherished works in Jewish literature, is the last of the Five Megilloth that form part of the third division of the Bible, known as **כתובים** (Sacred Writings). *Megillath Esther* has come to be known as *the Megillah*, a designation indicative of the great importance assigned to it by the Jewish people. It tells the story of a Jewish girl who used her influence as queen of Persia to save her people from a general massacre which Haman had plotted against them. It is a tale of plot and counterplot, showing the downfall of the arrogant and the vindication of the innocent. Haman's plot was frustrated, and the tables were completely turned. Out of these happenings the Feast of Purim came into being. The name of the feast, *Purim*, is a non-Hebrew word meaning *lot*, because they cast *pur* in the presence of Haman to fix the exact date of the extermination, but the Jews escaped, successfully resisting their persecutors on that date (Adar 13). Purim is observed on Adar 14, and the following day (*Shushan Purim*) is observed as Purim in cities which have been walled since the time of Joshua (Jerusalem, for example).

The divine name is not mentioned in the book of Esther; nor does it contain reference to any book of the Bible; nor does it allude to Jerusalem or to the Temple. Nevertheless it is one of the most cherished of our sacred writings. In times of oppression, our people have found comfort in this narrative, strengthening their hope of being liberated in days of distress. Its character sketches and implied teachings provide an element of moral instruction. Haman's fate is a reminder of the idea that pride precedes a fall. Esther is described as dutiful to her guardian Mordecai and loyal unto death to her people. While the divine name is omitted from the book, the implication is clearly conveyed that Mordecai and Esther were used by God as instruments

for the deliverance of his people. A special talmudic tractate was written on the relevant regulations of the obligatory reading of the *Megillah* on Purim, both in the evening and the morning services.

After a literary analysis, Bible scholars have come to the conclusion that the author of the book of Esther was one of the skillful literary artists of his time, and that the narrative deserves to be reckoned among the masterpieces of literature. The story moves along smoothly, keeping the reader in suspense, until the denouement is reached in a powerfully dramatic moment in Esther's second banquet (chapter seven). The author knows how to make actions speak more effectively than words. The portrait of the character is formed in the mind of the reader by concrete action.

The characters are types rather than unique individuals. The king is the typical impulsive despot; Haman is the typical enemy of the Jewish people, drunk with pride and power; Esther is the beautiful woman who knows how to use her charms advantageously; Mordecai is the Jewish leader who knows how to seize the opportune moment. There is no finer example of irony than the account of Haman's humiliation and fall; he falls into his own trap and is reduced to a position of begging for his life at the queen's feet.

Megillath Antiochus, the Scroll of Antiochus, known also as **מגילת החשמונאים**, the Scroll of the Hasmoneans, has come down to us in both Aramaic and Hebrew. The Hebrew version is a literal translation from the Aramaic original, which was composed probably in the seventh century. During the Middle Ages, this *Megillah* was read in the Italian synagogues on *Hanukkah* as the book of Esther, the *Megillah par excellence*, is read on *Purim*. It still forms part of the liturgy of the Yemenite Jews. Rav Saadyah Gaon attributed its authorship to the five sons of Mattathias. The following is an English translation of this *Megillah*, abridged.

PHILIP BIRNBAUM

חַמֵּשׁ מִגִּלּוֹת

FIVE MEGILLOTH

שיר השירים

א

שיר השירים אשר לשלמה: ישלני משיקות פיהו כד
טובים הדוד מיון: לרית שמנה טובים שמן תורבן שמך
עלבן עלמות אהבה: משכני אהבה נרצה הביאני
המלך הדוד נגילה ונשמחה בך נפירה הדוד מיון
מישרים אהבה: שחורה אני ונאורה בנות ירושלים
כאהלי קדר כיריעות שלמה: אלתראני שאני שחרחרת
ששופתני השמש בני אמי נחרבני שמיני נטרה אתי
הכרמים ברמי שלי לא נטיתי: הנדה לי שאהבה
נפשי איכה תרצה איכה תרביץ בצאננים שלמה אהלה
בעטתה על עדרי חברה: אם לא תדעי לך היפה בנשים
צאריך בעקבי הצאן ודעי את נדיתך על משכנות
הדעים: לססתי ברכבי פרעה דמיתך רעיתי: נאני

שיר השירים is recited every Friday evening because of the religious idealism attached to it by tradition. The poem has been accepted throughout the ages as an allegory of the relations between God and his people. Some nineteen centuries ago, Rabbi Akiba declared: "All the *Kethuvim* are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holiest of all." According to the paraphrase of the Targum, the poem portrays the history of Israel till the times of the Messiah. It has

THE SONG OF SONGS

I

The Song of Songs by Solomon.

O that he would kiss me with his lips! Indeed, your caresses are better than wine. Sweet is the fragrance of your perfumes; your very self is a precious perfume; therefore do the maidens love you. Take me with you; let us hasten! The king brings me into his chambers. We will thrill with delight over you; we will celebrate your caresses more than wine! Rightly do they love you.

I am dark yet comely, maidens of Jerusalem: dark as the tents of Kedar, comely as the curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, for the sun has tanned me; my mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards; I did not look after my own vineyard.

Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you feed the flocks, where you make them rest at noon; why should I wander among the flocks of your companions?

If you do not know, fairest of women, follow the sheep-tracks, and pasture your kids beside the tents of the shepherds. I compare you, my love, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots. Beautiful are your

been regarded also as a representation of the affection of Israel for the Sabbath. The author of the poem לכה דודי, "one of the finest pieces of religious poetry in existence," used the theme of the Sabbath bride and borrowed the title of his famous hymn from the Song of Songs (7:12). Although its meaning has been extended by various methods of interpretation, one cannot miss the beauty of the poem in its literal interpretation. Its author takes us along with him into the open air, to the vineyards, the villages, the mountains. He awakens us at daybreak to catch the scent of the forest trees, to gather the apples and the pomegranates. His verse is fragrant with the breath of spring

קדר a tribe of nomads who wandered in the Arabian desert.

לרמי שלי that is, my personal beauty. The phrase is often used in the sense of neglecting one's family while being engrossed in public duties.

לסוסי The point of comparison is the rich ornamentation of the bride.

לְחִינֶיךָ בַּתּוֹרִים צִוְּאֶהָךְ בַּחֲרוֹתִים: תּוֹרֵי זֶהָב נַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ
 עִם נִקְדּוֹת הַכֶּסֶף: עַד־שֶׁהִמְלִיךְ בְּמִסְכּוֹ נִרְדֵּי נִתֵּן רִחוֹ:
 צִוּר הַמָּר | דּוּדֵי לֵי בֵין שְׂרֵי יָלִין: אֲשַׁכֵּל הַכֶּפֶר וְדוּדֵי
 לֵי בְכַרְמִי עֵין גְּדִי: הִנֵּךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הִנֵּךְ יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים:
 הִנֵּךְ יָפָה דּוּדֵי אֵת נָעִים אֶת־עַרְשִׁנִּי רַעֲנָנָה: קָרוֹת בְּתֵלֵנוּ
 אֲרָתִים רְחִיטֵנוּ בְּרוֹתִים:

ב

אֲנִי חִבַּצְתִּי הַשָּׁדִיזִן שׁוֹשַׁנֶּת הָעֲמָקִים: בְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין
 הַחֲרוֹתִים כֵּן רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת: בְּתַפּוֹת בַּעֲצֵי הַיָּעַר כֵּן
 דּוּדֵי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בָּצַל הַמִּדְרֵי וְשִׁבְתִּי וּפְרִיז מִתּוֹךְ לַחֲכִי:
 הִבֵּאֵנִי אֶל־בֵּית הַיָּין וְדִגְלוּ עָלַי אֲהַבָּה: סִמְכוּנִי בְּאִשִּׁישׁוֹת
 דְּפָדוּנִי בַּתַּפּוּחִים כִּידוּלֶת אֲהַבָּה אֲנִי: שְׁמַאלִי תַחַת
 לְרֹאשִׁי וַיִּמְנוּ תַחֲבֻקָּנִי: הַשִּׁבְעָתִי אֲתָכֶם בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
 בְּצִבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאִילֹת הַשָּׁדָה אִם־תַּעֲצִירוּ | וְאִם־תַּעֲדִירוּ
 אֶת־דְּאֲהַבָּה עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ: קוֹל דּוּדֵי הַגִּהֲזָה בֶּא מְדַלָּ
 עַל־הַהָרִים מִקֶּפֶץ עַל־הַגְּבוּעוֹת: דּוּמָה דּוּדֵי לִצְבִי אוֹ
 לְעַפָּר הָאֵילִים הַגִּהֲזָה עוֹמֵד אַחֵר בְּתֵלֵנוּ מִשְׁנֵית מִן
 קְרִי רְחִיטֵנוּ קְרִי לֵךְ קְרִי וּמְרַאךְ

Following are a number of expressions occurring in the Song of Songs, which are of special stylistic interest. They are here presented in the lower margins of the Hebrew pages.

רוּחֵנוּ our rafters, panelled ceilings. The cedar trees and fir trees form the roof over their heads as they sit in the green grass.

חִבַּצְתִּי הַשָּׁדָה She modestly compares herself to the wild flowers of Sharon.

אִילוֹת are symbolic of shyness and timidity as well as of beauty.

עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ that is, it should be allowed to awake of itself. A true love is spontaneous.

cheeks with circlets, your neck with strings of beads! Circlets of gold will we make for you, with studs of silver.

While the king sits at his table, my nard gives forth its fragrance. My beloved is my bunch of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is my cluster of henna-blossom from the gardens of Engedi.

You are beautiful, my love, you are beautiful; your eyes are dove-like.

You are handsome, my beloved, and pleasant; and our couch is leafy. The beams of our houses are cedars, and our rafters are firs.

II

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Like a lily among thorns, so is my loved one among the maidens.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the youths; in his shadow I long to sit, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He brings me to the house of wine, and looks at me with love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am love-sick. O that his left hand were under my head, and his right hand were embracing me! I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the deer of the field, do not stir up, do not rouse love, until it please.

The voice of my beloved! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills! My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer; here he stands, behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

Originally, there were several midrashic works commenting on the Song of Songs. One of them referred the poem to the revelation at Mount Sinai, another to the exodus from Egypt, and a third to the Temple or the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary used in the wilderness. These midrashim were afterward combined into one work, the present *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah*, which must have been composed about the end of the eighth century. Unlike *Shir ha-Shirim Zuta*, a smaller midrash containing numerous legends, which was composed not later than the middle of the tenth century, *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* does not consist of many *aggadoth*.

Eretz Yisrael in springtime is graphically described in the Song of Songs: the land is beautifully green, and carpeted with flowers. The air is fresh and

הַחֲלִטֹת מֵצִיץ מִן־הַחֲרָבִים: עֲנָה דודי וְאָמַר לִי קוֹמִי
 לֵךְ רַעֲיָתִי יִפְתִּי וּלְכִי־לֵךְ: כִּי־הִנֵּה הִסְתּוֹ עֵבֶר הַנֶּשֶׁם
 חֲלָף הֵלֵךְ לוֹ: הַנִּצְנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ עֵת הַזֹּמִיר הִגִּיעַ וְקוֹל
 הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמָע בְּאַרְצֵנוּ: הִתְאֲנָה חֲנֻמָּה פִּנְיָה וְהַגִּפְנִים
 סָמְדָר נָתְנוּ רֵיחַ קוֹמִי לָכֵי רַעֲיָתִי יִפְתִּי וּלְכִי־לֵךְ: יוֹנְתִי
 בְּחֻגֵי הַסֶּלַע בִּסְתֵל הַמְדִּירָה נִרְאִינִי אֶת־מִרְאֵיךְ
 הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת־קוֹלְךָ כִּי־קוֹלְךָ עֲרֵב וּמִרְאֵיךְ נָאוֹה: אַחֲוֹר
 לָנוּ שָׁעִלִים שָׁעִלִים קִמְנִים מְחַבְּלִים בְּרָמִים וּבְרָמִינוּ
 סָמְדָר: דודי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ הָרֵעָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים: עַד שִׁיפוֹתַי
 הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים סָבָּ וְהִדְהִילָךְ דודי לָצֵבִי אֲנִי לְעַפְרָה
 הָאֵילִים עַל־הָרֵי בְּתֹר:

ג

עַל־מִשְׁכָּבִי בְּלִילֹת בִּקְשָׁתִי אֶת שְׁאֵהְבָה נִפְשִׁי בִקְשָׁתִי
 וְלֹא מִצְאָתִיו: אֶקְוֶהָ נָא וְאֶסּוּבְכָּהּ בְּעִיר בְּשׁוֹקִים
 וּבְרַחֲבוֹת אֲבִקְשָׁה אֶת שְׁאֵהְבָה נִפְשִׁי בִקְשָׁתִי וְלֹא
 מִצְאָתִיו: מִצְאוֹנֵי הַשְּׁמֶרִים הַסִּבְכִּים בְּעִיר אֶת
 שְׁאֵהְבָה נִפְשִׁי רֵאיתָם: בְּמַעַמַּי שְׁעַבְרָתִי מֵלֶם עַד

קִרְיַת הַשְּׁתִּי

laden with sweet scents. The sky is blue, the mountains and plains look beautiful, and the sun is gentle. All these seem combined to make one glad to be alive. The henna-blossom (אשכל הכסר) has fragrant flowers, growing in clusters like grapes. It is presently found in Kibbutz En-Gedi, the most delightful spot on the western shore of the Dead Sea, an oasis of luxurious vegetation.

The powders of the merchant (אבקת ריחל) are powdered perfumes. King Solomon's palanquin (אסרין), made of costly cedar and cyprus of Lebanon, is described as having had silver pillars supporting the canopy, arms of gold, and a seat covered with a costly purple fabric.

My beloved called and said to me: "Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. For, lo, the winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of song has come; and the call of the turtle-dove is heard in our land; the fig-tree is ripening its early figs, and the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance. Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your form is comely."

Seize us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom.

My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feeds his flock among the lilies. When the day grows cool, and the shadows flee, return, my beloved, and be like a gazelle, or like a young deer, on the mountains of Bether.

III

On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I did not find him. "I will rise [I said] and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares—I will seek him whom my soul loves." I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me: "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I left them, when I found him

It has been suggested that the closing part of the description (חכו רצוף) (אהבה) may allude to highly prized ebony (הובנה), mentioned in Ezekiel 27:16, since the Hebrew words הובנה and אהבה are very similar. Accordingly, the original meaning of the phrase in question would be: inlaid with ebony from the maidens of Jerusalem.

אחוז לו שעלים is a couplet of a vineyard song which she sings in response to his request to let him hear her voice.

ונסו הצללים the shadows of rocks and trees disappear when the sun sets.

... על משכבי is a dream she narrates to her friends.

עשן תמרות the pillars of smoke are caused by the burning of incense.

... שערך The bride's dark hair, hanging down in tresses over her shoulders, is compared to a herd of black goats couching on the slopes of the hill.

מתאימות symmetrical, running accurately in pairs, the upper teeth corresponding to the lower.

שִׁמְצָאתִי אֶת שְׂאֵהָבָה נִפְשִׁי אֲחֻזְתִּיו וְלֹא אֲרַפְנוּ עֵד-
 שֶׁהֵבִיאתִיו אֶל-בֵּית אִמִּי וְאֶל-חֹדֶר הַדֶּרֶתִּי: הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי
 אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּצַבָּאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה אִם-
 תַּעֲדוּ וְאִם-תַּעֲזֹרְרוּ אֶת-הָאֵהָבָה עַד-שֶׁתַּחֲפִץ: מִי זֹאת
 עָלָה מִן-הַמִּדְבָּר בְּתִמְרוֹת עֵשֶׂן מִקְשֶׁרֶת מֶרֶץ וּלְבוֹנָה מִכָּל
 אֲבֻקַּת רֹחַב: הִנֵּה מִשְׁתּוֹ שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה שְׂשִׁים גְּבֻרִים סָבִיב
 לָהּ מִגְּבֻרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כָּלֵם אֲחֹוִי חָרֵב מִלְּמֹדִי מִלְּחֻמָּהּ
 אִישׁ חֲרָבִי עַל-יָדָיו מִפֶּחֶד בְּלִילוֹת: אִפְרוֹזִן עָשָׂה לִּי
 הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה מִעֵצֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן: עֲמוּדָיו עָשָׂה כֶּסֶף רִפְדֹתָיו
 זָהָב מִרְקָבוֹ אֲרָגְמָן תּוֹכוֹ רִצּוֹף אֵהָבָה מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם:
 צֹאנֶיהָ וְרֹאנֶיהָ בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בַּעֲטָרָה שְׁעִמְרָה
 לִי אִמִּי בָנוּם חֲתָנָתִי וּבָנוּם שְׂמִתָּת לְבֹי:

ד

הַנֶּךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הִנֵּךְ יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים מִכַּעַד לְצִמְחָתְךָ
 שַׁעֲרֶךָ כַּעֲדָר הָעֹזִים שֶׁנִּלְשׁוּ מִהָרָ גִּלְעָד: שֶׁנֶּךָ כַּעֲדָר
 הַקְּצִיבוֹת שֶׁעָלוּ מִן-הַרְחָצָה שֶׁכָּלֵם מִתְאִיְמוֹת וְשֶׁכָּלָהּ
 אֵין בָּהֶם: כְּחוֹט הַשָּׁנִי שֶׁפְּתוּתֶיךָ וּמִדְּבָרְךָ נֶאֱוָה כִּפְלַח
 הַרְמוֹן רִקְתָּךְ מִכַּעַד לְצִמְחָתְךָ: כִּמְגִדֵּל דָּוִד צֹאנֶיךָ בְּנוֹי
 לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת אֶלֶף הַמֶּנֶן תָּלוּ עָלָיו כָּל שְׁלֹטֵי הַגְּבֻרִים:

like the rounded form and ruddy color of a pomegranate.
 בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת is an allusion to the bride's necklace. On shields used as adorn-
 ments on the outside of towers, see Ezekiel 27:10–11.

... אֲנִי מִלְּבָנוֹן is a warning to flee from Lebanon being full of dangers.

... וְחֹשֶׁרֶת depart; compare וְחֹשֶׁרֶת (Isaiah 57:9) "you journeyed."

אֲחֻזְתִּי is used here in the sense of "my own."

נֶחֱמֶה honey that drips from the honeycomb. The reference is to loving words.

whom my soul loves. I held him and would not let him go, until I brought him into my mother's house, into the chamber of her who conceived me.

I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the deer of the field, do not stir up, do not rouse love, until it please.

What is this coming up from the wilderness, like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all aromatic powders of the merchant? It is Solomon's palanquin; sixty heroes are around it, heroes of Israel. All of them are armed with swords, and are trained in war; each has his sword on his hip, because of danger at night. King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon. He made its columns of silver, its top of gold, its seat of purple, its interior inlaid with love, from the maidens of Jerusalem. Go forth, maidens of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, wearing a crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his marriage, on the day of his profound joy.

IV

You are beautiful, my love, you are beautiful! Your eyes are dove-like behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats, trailing down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep all shaped alike, which have come up from the washing; all of them are paired, and not one of them is missing. Your lips are like a thread of scarlet, and your mouth is comely; your temples, behind your veil, are like a slice of pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David built for trophies; a thousand shields hang on it,

The Song of Songs, meaning the finest of Solomon's songs, is reckoned among the books known as the wisdom literature of the Bible, even though it contains no direct teaching as in the case of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some have understood the Song of Songs as an admonition to a married couple to love each other.

The following excerpts from the Song of Songs are most characteristic. They are presented in the lower margin of the English text:

I hear the voice of my beloved! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills! My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer. There he stands, behind the wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

שָׁנִי שְׂדֵיךָ כְּשָׁנִי עֲפָרִים תְּאוֹמֵי צִבְיָה הָרָעִים כְּשׁוֹשְׁנִים:
 עַד שִׁיפּוֹת הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים אֵלֶיךָ לִי אֶל־הַר הַמּוֹר
 וְאֶל־גִּבְעַת הַלְבוּנָה: כִּלְכֵּל יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי וּמוֹם אֵין בָּךְ: אֲתִי
 מִלְּבֹנוֹן כָּלָה אֲתִי מִלְּבֹנוֹן תָּבוֹאִי תִשׁוּרִי וּמֵרֶאשׁ אֲמִנָּה
 מֵרֶאשׁ שְׁנִיר וְהֶרְמוֹן מִמְּעֻנּוֹת אֲרִיזוֹת מִהַרְרֵי גְמָרִים:
 לִבְכֹּתִנִי אֲחֹתִי כָלָה לִבְכֹּתִנִי בְּאַחַת מִעֵינֶיךָ בְּאַחַד עֵינֶיךָ
 מִצְוֹרֶיךָ: מִהֲיָפוּ דְרָךְ אֲחֹתִי כָלָה מִהֲיָפוּ דְרָךְ מִיָּן
 וְרִיחַ שְׁמֹנֶיךָ מִכָּל־בְּשָׁמִים: נִפְתַּת תִּשְׁכַּפֶּנָּה שִׁפְתוֹתֶיךָ כָלָה
 דִּבֶּשׁ וְחֹלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנְךָ וְרִיחַ שְׁלֹמֹתֶיךָ כִּרְיִת לְבָנוֹן:
 גֵּן וְנָעוּל אֲחֹתִי כָלָה גֵּן וְנָעוּל מִעֵיָן חֲתוּם: שְׁלַחֲךָ
 פָּרָדִים רִמּוֹנִים עִם פָּרִי מִגְדִּים כְּפָרִים עִם־נִדְדִים: גִּרְדּוּ
 וְכִרְפֹּם קִנָּה וְקִנְמֹן עִם כָּל־עֵצִי לְבוֹנָה מֵרֶ וְאֶהְלוֹם עִם
 כָּל־רֵאשֵׁי בְשָׁמִים: מִעֵיָן נָגִים בָּאֵר מִנֶּם חַיִּים וְנִזְלִים
 מִדְּלִבָּנוֹן: צִוִּי צִפּוֹן וְבוֹאִי תִימָן הַפִּיחִי נֹנִי יִלְלוּ בְּשִׁמּוֹ
 יִבֹּא דוּדִי לָנֹנִי וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מִגְדּוֹ:

ה

בָּאתִי לָנֹנִי אֲחֹתִי כָלָה אֲרִיזִי מוֹרִי עִם־בְּשָׁמִי אֲכַלְתִּי
 יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִן עִם־חֶלְבִי אֲכָלוּ רַעִים שְׁתּוֹ
 וְשָׁכְרוּ הַדּוּדִים: אֲנִי יִשְׁנָה וְלִבִּי עַר קוֹל וְהוֹרִי דוּפֵק

צפון The north wind clears the air in Palestine; the south wind warms, and ripens. The east and west winds are stormy.

מה חעירו ומה תעוררו Compare below (I Kings 12:16). מה לו חלק בדוד ולא נחלה בבדשי; (8:4) את האהבה

... ידי his fingers are delicately rounded, and his nails are as transparent as topaz. ססירים the bright blue veins showing through the lighter skin.

חרצה ("delight") was an ancient city famed for its attractiveness. It is mentioned in Joshua 12:24; I Kings 14:17.

all armor of heroes. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, pasturing among the lilies. When the day grows cool, and the shadows flee, I will betake myself to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no blemish in you.

Come with me from Lebanon, bride of mine, with me from Lebanon come; depart from the top of Amana, from the peaks of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace. How lovely are your caresses, my sister, my bride! How much better than wine are your caresses, and the fragrance of your ointments than all kinds of perfume! Your lips, my bride, drip honey; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden inclosed is my sister, my bride, a spring inclosed, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, together with all the finest perfumes. You are a fountain of gardens, a well of fresh water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Awake, northwind, and come, southwind! Blow upon my garden, that its perfume may waft out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat its precious fruits.

V

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh and my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends; drink, drink abundantly beloved friends!

I was asleep, but my heart was awake; hark, my beloved is

My beloved called and said to me: Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. For, lo, the winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of songs has come!

פתח־לִי אֶחָתִי רַעִיתִי יוֹנָתִי תַמְתִּי שְׂדֵאֲשִׁי נִמְלֵא־מָלַךְ
 קְנֻצוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לֵילָה: פִּשְׁטִמְתִּי אֶת־כַּתְנֹתַי אֵיכָבֶה אֶל־כִּשְׁנוֹה
 רִחְצֹתִי אֶת־רִגְלִי אֵיכָבֶה אֲטַנְּפֶם: דּוּדִי שֶׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־
 הַחֹדֶר וּמַעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו: קָמְתִי אָנֹכִי לִפְתּוֹחַ לְדוּדִי וַיִּדְּבִי
 נִטְפַר־מִזֶּרֶם וַאֲצַבְעֹתַי מִזֶּר עָבַר עַל פִּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל: פִּתַּחְתִּי
 אָנֹכִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי חָמַק עָבַר נִפְשִׁי יֵצֵאָה בְּרִבְרוֹ בִּקְשָׁתִיהוּ
 וְלֹא מֵצֵאתִיהוּ קָרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי: מֵצֵאֲנִי רַחֲשֻׁמִּים
 הַסִּבְבִּים בְּעִיר הַכּוֹנִי פִצְעוֹנִי נִשְׂאוּ אֶת־דִּדְדִּי מֵעָלַי
 שִׁמְרֵי הַחֲמוֹת: הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם אִם־
 תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דּוּדִי מִהִתְגִּידוֹ לֹא שְׁחֹלֶלֶת אֶהְבֶּה אָנֹכִי: מִדֶּֽ
 דִּתֶּךָ מִדּוֹד הַיָּפֶה בְּנָשִׁים מִה־דִּתְךָ מִדּוֹד שֶׁכֶּבֶה
 הִשְׁבַּעְתָּנוּ: דּוּדִי צֹחַ וְאֶדֹם דָּגוּל מִרְבֶּכֶה: רֹאשׁוֹ פָתַם
 פֶּן קְנֻצוֹתָיו תִּלְתְּלִים שְׁחֹרֹת כְּעוֹרֶב: עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים עַל־
 אֶפְרָיִם מִיֹּם רִחְצוֹת בַּחֲלָב יִשְׁבוֹת עַל־מִלְכָּאֵת: לִחְוֹ
 כְּעֶרְוַת הַבָּשָׂם מְגִדְלוֹת מְרַקְחִים שִׁפְתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשְׁנִים
 נִטְפּוֹת מִזֶּר עָבַר: יָדָיו גְּלִילִי וְהֵב מִמִּלְאִים בִּתְרֵשִׁישׁ
 מַעֲוֵי עֲשֵׂת שֶׁן מַעֲלָפֶת סְפִירִים: שׁוֹקָיו עֲמוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ
 מִסָּדִים עַל־אֲדָנֶיָּהּ מֵרָאשֵׁי כִלְכִּלָּן בַּחֹדֶר כְּאַרְנוֹן:
 חָבֹ מִמַּתְקִים וְכָלֹ מִחֲמָדִים זֶה דּוּדִי זֶה רַעִי בְּנוֹת
 יְרוּשָׁלַם:

are the words of the Shulammite, who asks why they would stare at her as at a public spectacle.

נַפְשִׁי וּבִטְנִי ("my soul and my body") in Psalm 31:10.

בִּטְנִי white, straight and slender.

שֶׁן refers to the soft shimmer of her eyes.

straight and symmetrical. The tower of Lebanon was probably some watch-tower in the direction of Damascus.

knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my innocent one; for my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." But I have taken off my robe; how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how shall I soil them? My beloved put his hand through the doorway, and my heart yearned for him. I rose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with the finest myrrh, upon the handles of the bar. I opened for my beloved; but my beloved had turned away, had gone; my soul failed when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he did not answer me. The watchmen who go about the city found me; they struck me, they wounded me; the guardians of the walls stripped me of my mantle. I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, do not tell him that I am love-sick.

What is your beloved more than another lover, O fairest of women? What is your beloved more than another lover, that you adjure us thus?

Dazzling and ruddy is my beloved, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is fine gold, his locks are curled, and as black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks, bathing in milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are beds of balsam-flower, producing sweet perfumes; his lips are [red] lilies, breathing the finest myrrh. His hands are rods of gold, studded with topaz pink; his body is polished ivory, inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble, set on bases of fine gold; his form is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether lovely. Such is my beloved, and such is my lover, O maidens of Jerusalem.

On my bed at night I looked for him whom my soul loves. I asked the watchmen: Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I left them where I found him. I held him and would not let go of him until I had brought him into my mother's house.

I was asleep, but my heart was awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking. I opened for my beloved, but he had turned away and was gone. I searched for him, but could not find him; I called him, but he did not answer.

ו

אֵנָה הַלֵּךְ דֹּדֶךָ הִנֵּה בְנָשִׁים אִמָּה פָנֶיהָ דֹּדֶךָ וּנְבִקְשֶׁנּוּ
עִמָּךְ: דֹּדִי יָבֵר לִנְנִי לַעֲרוּגֹת הַבָּשָׂם לַרְעוֹת בְּגָדִים
וְלִלְקָט שׁוֹשְׁנִים: אֲנִי לְדֹדִי וְדֹדִי לִי הָרוּעָה בְּשׁוֹשְׁנִים:
יָפָה אֶת רַעֲיָתִי כַתְרָצָה נֹאדָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם אִמָּה בְּגָדִים:
הִסְבִּי עֵינֶיךָ מִנִּגְדֵי שָׂהָם הִרְהִיבֵנִי שַׁעֲרֶךָ כַּעֲדָר הָעִזִּים
שֶׁנָּלְשׁוּ מִן־הַגִּלְעָד: שֵׁנֶיךָ כַּעֲדָר הַרְחֵלִים שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־
הַרְחָצָה שֶׁכֵּלָם מִתַּאיֲמוֹת וְשִׁכְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם: כִּפְלַח
הָרִמּוֹן רִקְתָּךְ מִכַּעַד לְצִמְתָּךְ: שְׁשִׁים הֵמָּה מַלְכוּת וּשְׁמֹנִים
פִּילִגְשִׁים וְעַלְמוֹת אֵין מִסְפָּר: אַחַת הִיא יוֹנָתִי תַמְתִּי
אַחַת הִיא לְאִמָּה בָּרָה הִיא לְיוֹלְדָתָהּ רְאוּהָ בָנוֹת
וַיֵּאשְׁרוּהָ מַלְכוּת וּפִילִגְשִׁים וַיְהַלְלוּהָ: מִיָּזֹאת הַנִּשְׁקָפָה
כְּמֹד־שָׁחַר יָפָה כְּלִבְנָה בָּרָה כַחֲמָה אִמָּה בְּגָדִים:
אֶל־גִּת אֲנֹךְ יִרְדֹּתִי לִרְאוֹת בְּאִבִּי הַנָּחַל לִרְאוֹת הַפְּרִדָּה
הַנֶּפֶן הַנָּצוּ הָרִמְנִים: לֹא יִרְעָתִי נִפְשִׁי שִׁמְתִּנִּי מִרְכָּבוֹת
עַמִּי נָדִיב:

ז

שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשּׁוֹלֵמִית שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנִחַדְהִיבָךְ מִהַתְחַחוּ
בְּשׁוֹלֵמִית כְּמַחֲלֵת הַמִּתְנַגִּים: מִהַיָּפוּ פַעֲמֶיךָ בְּנִעְלָם
בַּת־נָדִיב חֲמוּקִי יִרְכָּךְ כִּמּוֹ חֲלָאִים מַעֲשֶׂה יְדֵי אִמּוֹ:

ל an emblem of stateliness and beauty. The point of comparison is a head proudly held

VI

Where has your beloved gone, O fairest of women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the flower-beds of balsam, to pasture in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine, who pastures among the lilies.

You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my love, as comely as Jerusalem, as overawing as the most distinguished. Turn your eyes away from me, for they dazzle me. Your hair is like a flock of goats, trailing down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep, which have come up from the washing; all of them are paired, and not one of them is missing. Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate, behind your veil. There are sixty queens, eighty concubines, and maidens without number; but one alone is my dove, my innocent one; she is the only one of her mother; she is her mother's own darling. The maidens look upon her, and bless her; the queens and the concubines praise her. Who is she that appears like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as bright as the sun, as overawing as the most distinguished?

I went down to the nut garden, to look at the green plants of the dale, to see if the grapevine was a-budding, whether the pomegranates were in flower. Before I was aware, my fancy set me among the chariots of my noble people.

VII

Return, return, O Shulammite; return, return, that we may gaze at you.

Why should you gaze at the Shulammite as upon the dance of Mahanaim?

How beautiful are your steps in sandals, O princess; the curves of your thighs are like ornaments made by an artist. Your chest

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the flowerbeds of balsam, to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and he is mine.

How beautiful you are, how pleasing, my love, my delight! Your figure is like a palm tree.

שִׁרְרֶךָ אֲנִי הִסְתֵּר אֶל־חֹסֶר הַמֶּוֹג בְּמִנְךָ עֲרַמַת חַפְזִים
 סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים: שְׁנֵי שִׁדְיֶךָ בְּשֵׁנֵי עֲפָרִים תֵּאֱמָר צְבִיָּה:
 צוּאֲרֶךָ כַּמְגִּדֵל הַשֵּׁן עֵינֶיךָ בְּרֻכּוֹת בְּחֻשְׁפּוֹן עַל־שַׁעַר בַּת־
 רָפִים אַפֶּךָ כַּמְגִּדֵל הַלְבָנוֹן צוּפָה פָּנֶי דְמָשֶׁק: רֹאשְׁךָ
 עָלֶיךָ כְּכֶרֶם לֵד וְדִלְתָה רֹאשְׁךָ כְּאַרְזֵמָן מֶלֶךְ אֲסוּר בְּרֹדֵמִים:
 מִהֲדִפִּיתָ וּמִהֲנָעַמְתָּ אֲהַבָּה בַת־עֲנוּגִים: וְאַתָּה קוֹמְתִיךָ
 דִּמְתָּה לְחֹמֶר וְשִׁדְיֶךָ לְאִשְׁכָלוֹת: אִמְרָתִי אֵעֲלֶה בְתִמְרֵי
 אֲחֹתָ בְּסִסְמִנֵּי וְהִדְרִנָּא שִׁדְיֶךָ כְּאִשְׁכָלוֹת הַנֶּפֶן וְהִחַ
 אַפֶּךָ כַּמְפֹּחִים: וְחִכְךָ כִּיֵּן הַטּוֹב הוֹלֵךְ לְדוּדֵי לְמִשְׁרָם
 דּוֹבֵב שִׁפְתֵי יְשָׁנִים: אֲנִי לְדוּדֵי וְעָלִי תְשׁוּקָתוֹ: לֵבָה דוּדֵי
 גִּצָּה הַשְׂדֵּה נִלְיָה בַּכְּפָרִים: נִשְׁכִּימָה לְכַרְמִים נִרְאָה
 אִם־פְּרוּחָה הַנֶּפֶן פֶּתַח הַסִּמְדָּר הַגָּזוּ הַרְמוּנִים שָׁם אֲתֵן
 אֶת־דוּדֵי לֶךְ: הַדּוּדָאִים נִתְנַדְּרִים וְעַל־פֶּתַח־נִי כָל־מְגִדִּים
 חֲדָשִׁים גַּם־יְשָׁנִים דוּדֵי צִפְנִיתִי לֶךְ:

ח

מִי יִתְּנֶךָ כְּאֶת לִי יִזְנֶךָ שְׁדֵי אִמִּי אִמְצֶאךָ בְּחוּץ אֲשַׁקֶּךָ
 גַּם לֹא־יָבוֹז לִי: אֲנִהְיֶךָ אֲבִיאֶךָ אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי תִלְמְדֵנִי
 אֲשַׁקֶּךָ מִיַּיִן הָרֶקֶת מַעֲסִים רַמְנִי: שְׂמָאלִי תַּחַת רֹאשִׁי

... She points out incidents and places that are memorable to both of them.

om signet ring, engraved with the owner's name or some design. The seal, affixed as signature to letters and documents, was worn on the finger or was strung on a cord and hung around the neck. She wishes to be united in the closest way with her beloved.

is like a round goblet ever filled with wine; your body is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like a tower of ivory; your eyes are like the pools of Heshbon, at the gate of Bathrabim; your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus. Your head is on you like Carmel, and the hair of your head is like purple; the king is held captive in its tresses. How beautiful, how sweet you are, O love's delight! This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like clusters. I say: I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches; let your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like that of apples, and your soft speech like the best wine—flowing smoothly for my beloved, gliding over the lips of those about to sleep.

I am my beloved's, and his longing is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go into the field, let us stay in the villages; let us go early to the vineyards, to see whether the grapevine has budded, whether the vine blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give my love to you. The love-plants yield their fragrance, and at our doors are all kinds of precious fruits, both new and old, which I have kept for you, my beloved.

VIII

O that you were my brother, who had been nursed by my mother! I would meet you in the street and kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into my mother's house, that you might instruct me; I would give you some spiced wine to drink, some of my pomegranate juice.

Come, let us go into the fields, let us stay in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards, to see whether the grapevine has budded, whether the vine blossoms have opened, whether the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give my love to you.

Love is strong as death itself; its flashes are flashes of fire, a flame of the Lord. Floods cannot quench love, rivers cannot drown it. If a man offered all his wealth for love, he would be utterly scorned.

וַיִּמְנוּ תַחֲבֻקֵּי: הַשְׂבָּעֵתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם מִהֲתַעֲרוּ
 וּמִהֲתַעֲרוּ אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה עַד שְׂתַחֲפֹץ: מִי זֹאת עָלָה
 מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר מִתְרַפֶּקֶת עַל־הַיְּדֻדָּה תַּחַת הַתְּפִלֹּת עֲזָרְתִּיךָ
 שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָתְךָ אִמְךָ שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָה יִלְדָתְךָ: שִׁימֵנִי כַחוֹתֶם
 עַל־לִבְךָ כַחוֹתֶם עַל־זִרְעֶךָ בִּרְצוֹנָה כְּמוֹת אֲהָבָה קָשָׁה
 כְּשֹׂאִיל קִנְיָה רִשְׁפִּיהָ רִשְׁפִּי אֵשׁ שִׁלְהִבְתָּהּ: מִים רַבִּים
 לֹא יִכְלוּ לִכְבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה וְנִהְרֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ אִם־
 יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הֶזֶן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאֲהָבָה בּוֹ יִבְחוּ לוֹ: אֲחוֹת
 לִנִּי קִטְנָה וְשֹׂדִים אֵין לָהּ מִהַנְעִשָׂה לְאֲחוֹתֵי בָיִם
 שִׁדְּכֶרְבָּהּ: אִם־חֹמֶמָה הִיא נִבְנָה עָלֶיהָ מִדֶּרֶת כֶּסֶף
 וְאִם־דָּלֶת הִיא נִצּוֹר עָלֶיהָ לֹחַ אֶחָד: אֲנִי חֹמֶמָה וְשֹׂדֵד
 כַּמְנַדְלֹת אֲנִי הֵייתִי בְעֵינָיו כַּמִּצָּאת שְׁלוֹם: כָּרֶם הָיָה
 לְשִׁלְמָה בְּבַעַל הַמֶּזֶן נָתַן אֶת־הַכָּרֶם לְנֹטְרִים אִישׁ יָבֹא
 בַּכְּרִיז אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף: כְּרָמִי שְׁלִי לִפְנֵי הָאֵלֶף לֵךְ שִׁלְמָה
 יִקְאֲתִים לְנֹטְרִים אֶת־פְּרִיָּו: הִי־שָׁכַת בְּנָגִים חֲבֵרִים
 מִקְשִׁיבִים לְקוֹלָךְ הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי: בְּרַח וְדוּדִי וְדַמְהִלְךָ לְצִבִּי
 אוֹ לְעֶסֶר הָאֵילִים עַל הָרִי בַשָּׁמַיִם:

וַיִּמְנוּ תַחֲבֻקֵּי a flame of supernatural, stupendous power.

אֲחוֹת לִנִּי קִטְנָה was the speech of her brothers in the past, when she was still too young to marry. She recalls having heard them say that they would reward her modesty with adornments and provide strong protection in the case of any sign of moral weakness.

... אִם חֹמֶמָה הִיא that is, if she preserves her innocence, we will reward her.

כָּרֶם הָיָה that is, his possession is prized more than Solomon's highly-cultivated vineyard with all its rich revenues.

בְּרַח וְדוּדִי is a repetition of her song in 2:17. Allegorically, it is a prayer addressed to God: Mayest thou hasten to reappear on Mount Moriah.

O that his left hand were under my head, and his right hand were embracing me! I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, do not stir up, do not rouse love, until it please.

Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

I woke you under the apple tree, where your mother had been in travail with you, where she had brought you forth. Place me like a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm. Indeed, love is strong as death itself, ardent love is severe as the grave; its flashes are flashes of fire, a flame of the Lord. Floods cannot quench love, rivers cannot drown it; if a man offered all the wealth of his house for love, he would be laughed aside.

We have a young sister, and she has no breasts yet; but what shall we do with our sister when she will be asked in marriage? If she is a wall, we will build a silver turret on her; but if she is a door, we will inclose her with cedar boards.

Now I am a wall, and my breasts like towers, then I should win his favor.

Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he gave over the vineyard to caretakers; each would bring in a thousand silver pieces for its fruits. I keep my vineyard to myself; you, Solomon, are welcome to the thousand shekels, and the caretakers of the fruit to the two hundred shekels.

O you who sit in the gardens, the companions are listening to your voice; let me hear it too!

Make haste, my beloved, be like a gazelle, or like a young deer, on the mountains of spices.

The site of Baalhamon has not been identified. According to Rashi, it was in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. The name Baalhamon is suggestive of the throngs (*hamon*) of visitors that the place attracted. The extent of Solomon's vineyard at Baalhamon has been calculated from the number of tenants, each of whom paid a thousand silver pieces annually for the use of its fruit.

רות

א

יהי בימי שפט השפטים יהי רעב בארץ וילך איש מבית לחם יהודה לגור בשדו מואב הוא ואשתו ושני בניה: ושם האיש אלימלך ושם אשתו נעמי ושם שני בניה מחלון וכליזן אפרתים מבית לחם יהודה ויבאו שדו-מואב ויהורשם: וימת אלימלך איש נעמי ותשארה היא ושני בניה: וישאו להם נשים מאבות שם האחת ערפא ושם השנית רות וישבו שם בעשר שנים: וימתו גם-שניהם מחלון וכליזן ותשארה האשה משני ילדיה ומאשה: ותקם היא וכלתיה ותשב משדו מואב כי שמעה בשדו מואב כרפקר יהוה את-עמו לתת להם לחם: ותצא מן-המקום אשר היתה-שמה ושתי כלתיה עמה ותלכנה בדרך לשוב אל-ארץ יהודה: ותאמר נעמי

The book of Ruth forms part of the synagogue service on *Shavuoth*, the festival commemorating the Revelation at Mount Sinai, for the following two reasons: the festival is described both as חנוכה (festival of the first fruits) and ומן מתן תורה (festival of giving the Torah). The harvest figures prominently in the story of Ruth, who accepted the law of life prescribed in

R U T H

I

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to reside in the country of Moab, along with his wife and his two sons. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were called Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They arrived in the country of Moab and stayed there.

Elimelech the husband of Naomi died, and she was left with her two sons, who married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other Ruth. They stayed there about ten years. Both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. She then set out with her daughters-in-law to return home from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had remembered his people and given them bread.

She set out from the place where she was, along with her daughters-in-law; but, as they went on the way to return to the land of Judah, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law:

the Torah when she accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi, married Boaz and became the ancestress of King David.

It is generally agreed that the book of Ruth is one of the most delightful stories ever written. It contains a beautiful example of filial devotion and demonstrates the reward for its practice by an alien, who has been better to Naomi her mother-in-law than seven sons. In Ruth we find a daughter clinging to her parent with true-hearted affection, being ready and willing to share Naomi's distress and loneliness. She is favored by God and men, and chosen by the influential Boaz of Bethlehem to be his wife. The young lonely widow of the first chapter is changed into a joyful mother of children in the last chapter. Her boy grows up to become the ancestor of the royal house of David.

לשתי בלתייה לכנה שבנה אשה לבית אמה יעשה יהוה
עמכם חסד כאשר עשיתם עסדמותים ועמדי: ותן יהוה
לכם ומצאן מנוחה אשה בית אישה ותשק לכן ותשאנה
קולן ותבקנה: ותאמרנה לה בראתך נשוב לעמד:
ותאמר נעמי שבנה בנתי למה תלכנה עמי העודלי
בנים במעי והיו לכם לאנשים: שבנה בנתי לכן כי
וקנתי מהיות לאיש כי אמרתי ישרלי תקנה גם העיני
הלי לה לאיש וגם ילדתי בנים: הלכן ותשברנה עד
אשר יגדלו הלהן תענה לבלתי הנות לאיש אל בנתי
ברמרלי מאד מכם בראצה בי יהוה: ותשנה קולן
ותבקנה עוד ותשק ערפה לחמותה ורות הבקרה:
ותאמר הנה שבה ובמתך אלעמה ואלאלהיה שובי
אחרי ובמתך: ותאמר רות אל תפגעירכי לעקבך לשוב
מאחריך כי אל אשר תלכי אלך ובאשר תליני אליו עמד
עמי ואלהך אלהי: באשר תמותי אמות ושם אקבר
בה יעשה יהוה לי וכה יסוף כי המות יפריד ביני ובינך:
ותרא ברמתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחדל לדבר אליה:
ותלכנה שתיהם עדבואנה בית לחם והיו כבאנה בית

קרי: יעש

The good qualities of Ruth are described as follows: she was careful to ask permission; she worked steadily, not resting during the hot hours of the day. She acknowledged herself an alien, destitute of right or claims; but Boaz commended the wisdom and affection which had brought her to take refuge under the protecting wings of the God of Israel.

In *Midrash Ruth*, Elimelech is described unfavorably and his name is interpreted as meaning "to me belongs royalty." He left Eretz Yisrael during the famine because he was afraid that the people might apply to him for help. Interpreting the very first words of the book of Ruth, the Midrash

"Go back, each of you, to your mother's house. May the Lord treat you kindly, as you have treated the dead and myself. May the Lord grant that each of you find rest in the home of a husband." Then she kissed them; but they wept loudly and said to her: "No, we will go back with you to your people." Naomi said: "Turn back, my daughters, why should you go with me? Have I other sons in my womb to be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way; I am too old to have a husband. If I were to say that I had hope, if I even had a husband this night and bore sons, would you wait on till they were grown? Would you let this restrain you from marrying? No, my daughters, my plight is too bitter, worse than yours, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me." Again they wept aloud; Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

Then she said: "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; go back with your sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you and to turn back from following you; wherever you go, I will go; wherever you stay, I will stay; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God; wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. [I swear], may the Lord do so and so to me, and worse, if anything but death part you and me." When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

The two went on till they reached Bethlehem. When they

tries to show that the famine occurred at a time when the people judged their judges, who perverted justice and were held responsible by the citizens.

The names of the persons mentioned in the book of Ruth seem to describe the characters of Naomi (pleasant), Mahlon (sickly), Chilion (wasting away), Orpah (turning her back on Naomi), Ruth (friend), Boaz (nimble, fleet). Naomi's bitterness ("call me Marah") yields to hope and gratitude.

לָחֶם וַתָּהֶם כָּל־הָעִיר עָלֵיהֶן וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הֲזֹאת נַעֲמִי:
וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶן אֶל־תִּקְרְאֵנָה לִי נַעֲמִי קְרָאן לִי מֵרֹא כִּי־
הִכָּר שְׂדֵי לִי מָאֹד: אֲנִי מִלֵּאָה הִלַּכְתִּי וְרִיכָם הִשִּׁיבֵנִי
יְהוָה לָמָּה תִּקְרְאֵנָה לִי נַעֲמִי יְהוָה עָנָה כִּי וְשְׂדֵי הָרֶעִי
לִי: וַתָּשָׁב נַעֲמִי וְרוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה כָלְתָהּ עִמָּהּ הַשָּׂבָרָה
מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב וְהָמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לָחֶם בְּתַחֲלֹת קֹצִיר שְׁעָרִים:

ב

וּלְנַעֲמִי מוֹדֵעַ לְאִשָּׁה אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חָיִל מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ
וְשָׁמָּה בָּעוּ: וַתֹּאמֶר רֹוֹת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֶל־נַעֲמִי אֵלֶיךָ־נָא
הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֶל־קֶטֶה בַּשָּׂבָלִים אַחֲרָי אֲשֶׁר אִמְצָאֲחֶן בְּעֵינָיו
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לֵכִי בְּתִי: וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבוֹא וַתִּלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרֵי
הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיִּקֶּר מִקֶּרֶה חֲלֹקֶת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבָעוּ אֲשֶׁר מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת
אֱלִימֶלֶךְ: וְהִנֵּה־בָּעוּ בָּא מִבֵּית לָחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לְקוֹצְרִים
יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה: וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעוּ לְנַעֲרֹ
הַנָּצֹב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים לְמִי הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת: וַיַּעַן הַנַּעֲרָה הַנָּצֹב
עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיֹּאמֶר נַעֲרָה מוֹאֲבִיָּה הִיא הַשָּׂבָרָה עִם־נַעֲמִי
מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־קֶטֶה־נָּא וְאִסַּפְתִּי בְּעֵמְרִים אַחֲרֵי
הַקּוֹצְרִים וַתָּבוֹא וַתַּעֲמִיד מֵאֹז הַכֹּקֶר וְעַד־עֹתָה וְהָ שְׂבָתָהּ

קרי: מודע.

Bethlehem-Judah was but a short distance from Moab, which was a fertile country in the early biblical period. Only a famine could have induced a Hebrew to migrate into this foreign land where he would have no right of citizenship.

The women-servants of Boaz are referred to as going over the ground after the reapers. Much would be wasted if this supplementary work were not performed, since the manner of reaping was quite slovenly in those primi-

arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was astir over them. The women said: "Is this Naomi?" But she said to them: "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Lord has made it very bitter for me; I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty-handed. Why do you call me Naomi? The Lord has turned against me; and the Almighty has brought disaster on me.

So Naomi returned with her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, who accompanied her back from the country of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

II

Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a brave man of wealth, who belonged to the family of Elimelech; his name was Boaz. Now, Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi: "Let me go to the field and glean ears of grain behind a reaper with whom I may find favor." So Naomi said to her: "Go, my daughter." When she went and gleaned in the field after the harvesters, she happened to come upon that part of the field which belonged to Boaz, of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters: "The Lord be with you!" They replied: "May the Lord bless you!" Then Boaz asked the foreman of the reapers: "Whose girl is this?" The foreman replied: "It is the Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab; she asked to be allowed to glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers. She came and has continued working from early morning until now, with scarcely a moment's rest inside the house."

tive times. The young men are the harvesters from all parts of the country, and are apt to be loose in conduct.

The harvesters in the Near East still dip their bread in vinegar and

הבית מעט; ויאמר בעצ אלהות הלוא שמעת בתי
אל-תלכי ללקט בשדה אחר וגם לא-תעבורי מזה ובה
תרבקין עם-נערתי: עיניך בשדה אשר-יקצרון והלכת
אחריהן הלוא צייתי את-הנערים לבלתי נגעך וצמת
והלכת אליהם ושתית מאשר ישאבון הנערים: ותפל
על-פניה ותשתחו ארצה ותאמר אליו מדוע מצאתי חן
בעיניך להכירני ואנכי נכריה: ויען בעצ ויאמר לה הנה
הנה לי כל אשר-עשית את-חמותך אחרי מות אישך
ותעזבי אביך ואמך וארץ מולדתך ותלכי אל-עם אשר
לא-ידעת תמול שלשם: ישלם יהוה פעלך ותהי
משכרתך שלמה מעם יהוה אלהי ישראל אשר-באת
לחסות תחת-כנפיו: ותאמר אמצאחן בעיניך אדני כי
נחמתני וכי דברת על-לב שפחתך ואנכי לא אהיה כאחת
שפחתך: ויאמר לה בעצ לעת האכל גשי הלם ואכלת
מדהלחם ומבלת פתך בחמץ ותשב מצד הקצרים
ויצבטלה קלי ותאכל ותשבץ ותתר: ותקם ללקט ויצו
בעצ את-נעריו לאמר גם בין העמרים תלקט ולא
תבלימה: וגם שלתשלו לה מדהצבתים ועובתם

find it very refreshing. Parched corn is their favorite food. The ears of grain, when not quite ripe, are roasted on an iron plate, or are thrust in small bundles into a fire of dry grass. The crusty flavor about it makes pleasant eating.

As a special favor, Ruth is allowed to glean among the standing sheaves, before they have been removed. The thrifty, affectionate Ruth carries to Naomi the parched grain which remained over from her midday meal, much in the manner of poor women taking home food from some feast which has been given them.

Then Boaz said to Ruth: "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field, do not leave this one, but keep here close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them up; I have ordered the young men not to molest you. Whenever you are thirsty, go to the cans and drink what the young men have drawn." Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him: "Why have I, a foreigner, found favor with you that you should take notice of me." But Boaz answered her: "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for what you have done. May you receive a rich reward from the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" She said: "May I prove worthy of your kindness; you have comforted me, your servant, and spoken consolingly to me, though I am not like one of your maids."

At mealtime, Boaz said to her: "Come here, eat some food; dip your bread in the vinegar." Then as she sat beside the reapers, he handed her some roasted grain; she ate till she was satisfied, and had some left over. She got up to glean, and Boaz instructed his servants, saying: "Let her glean even among the sheaves and do not scold her. Pull out even some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to glean; do not rebuke her."

According to Leviticus 25:25, 47-48, if an Israelite was compelled by poverty to dispose of his property, the seller's kinsman could compel the purchaser to sell it back to him, so as to preserve each family in possession of its land.

Levirate marriage, or the obligation of marrying the deceased brother's widow, aimed at preventing the extinction of the dead man's name and was

וּלְקָטָהּ וְלֹא תִנָּצֵר רָכָה: וְתִלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד־הָעֶרֶב וּתַחבֹּט
 אֶת אֲשֶׁר־לְקָטָהּ וְיָדֶי כְּאִיפָה שְׁעָרִים: וְתִשָּׂא וּתָבוֹא
 הָעִיר וְתֵרָא חֲמוּתָהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־לְקָטָהּ וְתוֹצֵא וְתִתֵּן לָהּ
 אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הוֹתִירָה מִשְׁבַּעָה: וְתֹאמֶר לָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ אִיפָה
 לְקָטָת הַיּוֹם וְאָנֹכּה עֹשִׂית יְהִי מִכִּירָךְ בָּרוּךְ וְתִגֵּד לְחֲמוּתָהּ
 אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂתָּה עִמּוֹ וְתֹאמֶר שֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי
 עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בָּעוֹ: וְתֹאמֶר נַעֲמִי לְכַלְתָּה בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָנָב חֲסִדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים וְתֹאמֶר לָהּ
 נַעֲמִי קְרֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִנְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא: וְתֹאמֶר רֹות הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה
 גַּם כִּי־אָמַר אֵלַי עַם־הַנְּעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־לִי תִדְבָּקוֹן עַד אִם־
 כִּלּוֹ אֶת כָּל־הַקֶּצִיר אֲשֶׁר־לִי: וְתֹאמֶר נַעֲמִי אֶל־רֹות
 כַּלְתָּה טוֹב בְּתִי כִי תִצְאִי עַם־נַעֲרוֹתָיו וְלֹא יִפְגַּעֲכֶךָ
 בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֵר: וְתִדְבָּק בְּנַעֲרוֹת בָּעוֹ לְלָקֹט עַד־כִּלּוֹת
 קֶצֶר־הַשְּׁעָרִים וּקְצִיר הַחֲטִים וְתִשָּׁב אֶת־חֲמוּתָהּ:

ג

וְתֹאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֹא אֲבִקֶּשְׁלָךְ מָנוֹחַ
 אֲשֶׁר יִיטַב־לָךְ: וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בָּעוֹ מְרַעְתָּנוּ אֲשֶׁר הָיִית אֶת־
 נַעֲרוֹתָיו הַגֵּד־הוּא וְרָה אֶת־נָרְן הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלֵּילָה:
 וְרַחֲצֵת וְסָכַת וְשִׁמְתָּ שְׂמֹלֶתְךָ עָלֶיךָ וַיְבַרְכֵּה הַגֵּרָן אֶל־
 תוֹדַעִי לָאִישׁ עַד כִּלְתּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשֹׁתוֹ: וַיְהִי בִשְׁכָבוֹ
 וַיִּדְעַת אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם וּבָאת וְגִלִית מִרְגְּלֶתְךָ

קרי: שמלותיך. וירדת.

designed to save the property belonging to a family from being dispersed among other families. The firstborn son of the levirate marriage was con-

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She took it up and went into the town, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. Then Ruth brought out and gave her what she had left over from lunch. Her mother-in-law asked her: "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the man who took notice of you be blessed!" So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said: "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law: "May he be blessed by the Lord, who is ever kind to the living and to the dead." She then told her: "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." And Ruth the Moabitess said: "He even told me: You shall keep close to my servants, till they have finished all my harvesting." Naomi then said to her daughter-in-law Ruth: "You will do well, my daughter, to accompany his maids, lest you be molested in some other field." So she kept close to the girls of Boaz, gleaning until the end of both barley and wheat harvests; she lived with her mother-in-law.

III

Then her mother-in-law Naomi said to her: "My daughter, I must seek a home for you, that you may fare well. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, with whose maids you have been working. Tonight he is winnowing barley in the threshing-floor. Wash and anoint yourself; put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, take note of the place where he lies. Then go in, uncover

sidered to be the son and heir of the man who died childless (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

וּשְׁכַבְתִּי וְהוּא יָגִיד לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂינָי: וְהָאָמֶר אֵלֶיךָ
 כָּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמְרִי: אַעֲשֶׂה: וְתָרַד הַגֶּחֶן וְתַעֲשֶׂה כְּכָל
 אֲשֶׁר-צִוְתָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ: וַיֹּאכַל בָּעֶז וַיִּשְׁתַּי וַיֵּטֶב לָבוֹ וַיָּבֹא
 לִשְׁכֵּב בַּקֶּצֶה הַצָּרְמָה וְתָבֹא בִלְטָו וְתִגַּל מְרִגְלוֹתַי וְתִשְׁכַּב:
 וְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיַּחֲרֹד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפַּת וַהֲנִה אִשָּׁה
 שֹׁכֶבֶת מְרִגְלוֹתָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר מִרְאֵת וְהָאָמֶר אֲנֹכִי רוּת אִמְתְּךָ
 וּפְרִשְׁתָּ כְּנֹפֶךְ עַל-אִמְתְּךָ כִּי גֹאֵל אַתָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה
 אַתָּה לַיהוָה בְּתִי הֵיטִבְתָּ חֲסִידְךָ הָאֲחֵרֹן מִדֶּהֱרָאשֶׁן
 לְבִלְתִּי-לָכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבְּחוּרִים אֲסִדֵּל וְאֲסִדְעִשִׁיר: וְעַתָּה
 בְּתִי אֵל-תִּירְאִי כָּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמְרִי אַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ כִּי יִדְעֶי כָּל
 עֵצֶר עִמִּי כִּי אֵשֶׁת חַיִל אַתָּה: וְעַתָּה כִּי אֲמַנֶּם כִּי אִם גֹּאֵל
 אֲנִכִּי וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי: לִנְי וְהַלְלִלָה וְהִתְהַלָּה
 בְּבִקְרֵי אֲסִי-וְגֹאֲלֶךָ טוֹב וְגֹאֵל וְאֲסִי-לֹא יַחֲפִיז לְגֹאֲלֶךָ
 וְגֹאֲלֶיךָ אֲנִכִּי חֲרִידָהּ שֹׁכֵבִי עַד-הַבֹּקֶר: וְתִשְׁכַּב מְרִגְלוֹתַי
 עַד-הַבֹּקֶר וְתִקֶּם בְּטָרוֹם יִכִּיר אִישׁ אֶת-יְדָעָדוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-
 יוֹדֵעַ כִּי-בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֶּחֶן: וַיֹּאמֶר הִבִּי הַמַּטְפֶּחֶת אֲשֶׁר-
 עָלֶיךָ וְאַחֲרִיכָה וְתֵאחָזוּ בָּהּ וַיִּמַּד שְׁש־שְׁעָרִים וַיָּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ
 תָּבֹא הָעִיר: וְתָבֹא אֶל-חֲמוּתָהּ וְהָאָמֶר מִרְאֵת בְּתִי
 וְתִגְדִּלָּה אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה-לָּהּ הָאִישׁ: וְהָאָמֶר שְׁש־
 הַשְּׁעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה גִּתָּן לִי כִּי אָמַר: אֵל-תָּבֹאִי רִיקָם אֶל-
 חֲמוּתְךָ: וְהָאָמֶר שְׁכִי בְתִי עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּדְעִין אֵיךְ יִפְלֵי
 דְּבָר כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ כִּי אֲסִי-בִלְלָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה:

קרי: ושכבת תאמרי אלי: כי גאל. מרגלותי. בטרם. אמר אלי.

Grain is winnowed in the evening, to take advantage of the cool sea-wind, which blows in Eretz Yisrael from 4 o'clock in the afternoon to half-an-hour before sunset. The threshing floor is generally on an elevated spot. The town

his feet, and lie down; he will tell you what to do." Ruth replied: "I will do whatever you say." So she went down to the threshing-floor and did exactly as her mother-in-law had instructed her.

Boaz ate and drank to his heart's content, and went to lie down at the end of the grain heap. Then she came in noiselessly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. In the middle of the night, however, the man was startled and bent forward; there was a woman lying at his feet. He asked: "Who are you?" And she replied: "I am your servant Ruth; now spread your robe over your servant, for you are a near kinsman." He said: "May the Lord bless you, my daughter; this last kindness of yours is even greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. Have no fear, my daughter; I will do for you all that you ask; all my townspeople know that you are a good woman. Now, it is true that I am a near kinsman, but there is a nearer kinsman than myself. Stay as you are for tonight, and in the morning, if he will claim you as your nearest kin, well and good; let him do a kinsman's duty. But if he will not do his duty as a kinsman to you, I will claim you myself, as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning." So she lay at his feet until morning, but rose before men could recognize one another. Boaz said: "Let it not be known that this woman came to the threshing-floor." Then he said to her: "Bring the mantle you are wearing and hold it open." So she held it open, and he poured out six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her back; then he went into the town.

Ruth came home to her mother-in-law, who asked: "How did you fare, my daughter?" So she told her all that the man had done for her, saying: "He gave me these six measures of barley, because he said: Do not come back to your mother-in-law empty-handed." Naomi then said: "My daughter, wait until you learn what happens, for the man will not rest till he settles the matter today."

of Bethlehem, however, is situated on the summit of the mountain range, hence it was necessary to go down to the threshing floor, which was an open space of clean, hard, dry ground.

וַבַּעַז עָלָה הַשַּׁעַר וַיָּשֶׁב שָׁם וְהָיָה הַגּוֹאֵל עִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-
 בָּעֵז וַיֹּאמֶר סוּדָה שְׂבֻדָּה פָּלְנִי אֶלְמִנִי וְהִסֵּר וַיָּשֶׁב:
 וַיִּקַּח עֲשָׂרָה אֲנָשִׁים מִזִּקְנֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂבֻדָּה וַיִּשְׁבוּ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר לְגֹאֵל הַלֵּקֶת הַשְּׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר לְאַחֵינוּ לְאֵלֵינוּ
 מִכֶּרֶה נַעֲמִי הַשְּׂבֻדָּה מִשְׂדֵּה מוֹאָב: וְאִנִּי אִמְרָתִי אֶגְלָה
 אֲזִנָּה לֵאמֹר קָנָה נָגֵד הַיֹּשְׁבִים וְנָגֵד זִקְנֵי עַמִּי אִסְתַּגְּנֹאֵל
 גֹּאֵל וְאִם-לֹא יִגְאֹל הַנִּגְדָּה לִי וְאֶדְעֶ בִּי אֵין וּלְחֹתֶךָ לְגֹאֵל
 וְאִנִּי אַחֲרָיִךָ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶגְאֹל: וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעֵז בְּיוֹם-
 קִנּוּתֶךָ הַשְּׂדֵה מִיַּד נַעֲמִי וּמֵאֵת רֹת הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת-דִּהֲמָה
 קָנִיתִי לְהִקִּים שְׂמִידָה מֵעַל-נַחְלָתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לֹא
 אוֹכֵל לְגֹאֵל-לִי פָדְאֲשׁוּחִית אֶת-נַחְלָתִי גֹאֲלֶיךָ אֵתָּה אֵת-
 גֹּאֲלָתִי בִּי לֹא-אוֹכֵל לְגֹאֵל: וְזֹאת לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-
 הַגֹּאֲלָה וְעַל-דִּהֲמוּרָה לְקִים כָּל-דִּבְרֵי שְׁלֹחַ אִישׁ נַעֲלוֹ
 וְנָתַן לְרַעְיוֹ וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל
 לְבָעֵז קָנָה-לְךָ וַיִּשְׁלַח נַעֲלוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעֵז לְזִקְנִים וְכָל-
 הָעָם עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם בִּי קָנִיתִי אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלֵינוּ
 וְאַתָּה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לְכַלְיוֹן וּמַחְלוֹן מִיַּד נַעֲמִי: וְגַם אֶת-רֹת
 הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת מַחְלוֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהִקִּים שְׂמִידָה מֵעַל-
 נַחְלָתוֹ וְלֹא-יִכְרֹת שְׂמִידָה מֵעַם אָחִיו וּמִשְׁעַר מִקוֹמוֹ

קרי: ואדעה.

The grain was winnowed by throwing it up with forks or shovels against the evening breeze, which blew away the chaff, while the heavier grain fell on the ground in a heap. The Torah forbids muzzling the oxen that are driven

IV

Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there; and there was the near kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken, passing by. So Boaz called to him by name, saying: "Step aside and sit down here." So he stepped aside and sat down. Then Boaz picked out ten of the elders of the town, and said: "Sit down here," so they sat down. Then he said to the near kinsman: "Naomi, who has come back from the Moabite country, is putting up for sale the piece of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. So I thought I would inform you, and say: Buy it in the presence of those who are sitting here, in the presence of the elders of my people. If you wish to acquire it as next of kin, redeem it; but if you will not claim it as next of kin, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one to claim it as next of kin except yourself, and I come after you." The man said: "I will redeem it." Then Boaz said: "Once you acquire the field from Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased man, so as to restore the name of the departed to his estate." The near relative replied: "I cannot take it up, lest I depreciate my own estate. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Now it used to be the custom in Israel that, to make binding a contract of redeeming or exchanging, one party would take off his sandal and give it to the other; this was how exchanges were attested in Israel. So when the near kinsman said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people: "You are witnesses today that I have acquired from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. I also take Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, as my wife, in order to

over the grain spread out on a level threshing floor, open to the air (Deuteronomy 25:4). This command enjoins a kind consideration for the beasts.

עדים אדם היום; ויאמרו כל־עַם אֱשֶׁר־שָׁמְעוּ וְהוֹדוּם
עַד־כִּי יָקוּ יְהוָה אֱתֶר־אֱשֶׁר הִבֵּאתָ אֶל־בְּנוֹתָיִךְ כְּרָחֶל וְ
וְכֵאלֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּעַל שְׁמוֹתֵם אֶת־בָּתִּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעֵשְׂרֹה־חֵל
כֹּה־נִפְלְאוֹת וְכֹה־אֱלֹהִים בָּבֵית לָחֵם; וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם כִּבְתֵּי פָרֹחַ
אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹחַד חֶמֶד לִיְהוָה מִדְּבַר־עַלְיוֹת אֲשֶׁר יָקָץ
מִדְּבַר־עֲלֵיָהּ הָאֵת; וַיִּפֹּחַ בָּעַן אֶת־דַּוִּד וְהוֹדִילָהּ לְאִשּׁוֹ
וַיָּבֵא אֶלֶּהָ יִתָּן יְהוָה לָהּ הַרְיוֹן וְהָלַךְ בָּהּ; וְהִמָּלְכָהּ
הַנְּשִׂים אֶל־עַמִּי בְרַחֲמֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁכַּחַת לָהּ נֶאֱמַר
הַיּוֹם וַיִּבְרָא שְׁמוֹ בַּיּוֹם־אֵל; וְהָיָה לָהּ לְמַשִּׁיב רֻחַ
וְלִכְלֹךְ אֶת־שִׁבְתָּךְ כִּי כִלְכֹךְ אֶשְׁרֹאֲבֶכֶךָ יִלְחֹחַ
אֶשְׁרֹה־יָא מִכּוֹחַ לָךְ מִשְׁכַּעַת בָּנִים; וַיִּפֹּחַ נֶעֱמִי אֶת־
הָלֶךְ וַשְׁמִיָּה בְּחִילָהּ וְהוֹדִילָהּ לְאִמָּתָה; וַתִּקְרָאָהּ לוֹ
בְּשִׁמְנוֹת שֵׁם לָאִמָּה יִרְמְיָה לְנֶעֱמִי וַתִּקְרָאָהּ שְׁמוֹ עִיבָה
כֹּה אֶבְרִישִׁי אֹבִי רָחֵל; וְאֶלֶּה הַתּוֹלְדוֹת פְּרִיץ הוֹלִיד אֶת־
אֶת־יִזְרָהּ; וַיִּזְרָח הוֹלִיד אֶת־יָדָם וְיָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־
עַמִּיָּה; וְעַמִּיָּה הוֹלִיד אֶת־נְחִישָׁן וְנְחִישָׁן הוֹלִיד אֶת־
שְׁלֹמֹה; וְשְׁלֹמֹה הוֹלִיד אֶת־בָּעַן וּבָעַן הוֹלִיד אֶת־עִיבָה;
וְעִיבָה הוֹלִיד אֶת־נִשִּׁי וְנִשִּׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת־יָדָה;

Flori Almoni, meaning so-and-so or such-and-such, are two words com-
pounded into one word, *Palmoni* (Daniel 8:13), used where the man's name
is unknown.

restore the name of the departed to his estate, so that the name of the deceased may not perish among his kinsmen, from the gate of his native place; you are witnesses this day." Then all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said: "We are witnesses. May the Lord make this woman, who is coming to your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you do well in Ephrathah and win fame in Bethlehem. May your house flourish like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, with the offspring that the Lord will give you from this girl."

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. He went in to her, and the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi: "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman; may he become famous in Israel. The child will revive your life and cherish you in your old age; for he is the son of your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better than seven sons to you." Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and became his nurse. The neighbor women gave him a name, saying: "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

These are the descendants of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

The shoe thrown over the land is a sign that possession is taken (Psalms 60:10; 108:10). The Hebrew word *goel* signifies the next-of-kin whose right it was to redeem his dead relative's property. It was the duty of the *goel* to marry the widow, if the relative had died childless.

אֵיכָה

א

אֵיכָה | יֹשְׁבָה בְדָד הָעִיר רַבְתִּי עִם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה
רַבְתִּי בְּנוּיִם שְׂרָתִי בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הָיְתָה לָמָס׃ בָּכּוֹ תִבְכֶּה
בְּלֵילָה וְדַמְעָתָהּ עַל לֶחֶזָהּ אֵיךְ לָהּ מִנְחָם מִכָּל-אֲהָבֶיהָ
כָּל-רֵעֶיהָ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ הָיוּ לָהּ לְאִיבִים׃ גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מֵעֵינֶי
וּמִרַב עֲבָדָהּ הִיא יֹשְׁבָה בְּנוּיִם לֹא מִצָּאָה מְנוּחַ כָּל-
דֹּרְפֶיהָ הַשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים׃ דֶּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן אֲבָלוֹת מִכָּל־
בָּאִי מוֹעֵד כָּל-שְׁעָרֶיהָ שׁוּמְמִין כְּהִנִּיחָה נְאֻנְחִים בְּתוֹלְתֶיהָ
נִיגוֹת וְהִיא מֵרָלָה׃ הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ אֵיבֶיהָ שָׁלוֹ כִּי-
יָהָה הַזֶּה עַל-רַב פְּשָׁעֶיהָ עֲוֹלָלֶיהָ הָלְכוּ שָׁבִי לִפְנֵי צָר׃
וַיָּצֵא מִדְּבַת-צִיּוֹן כָּל-הַדָּרָה הָיוּ שְׂרִיָּה כְּאֵילִים לֹא-מִצְאוּ
מִרְעָה וַיִּלְכוּ בְּלֹא-כֶחַ לִפְנֵי רוּדָף׃ זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְמֵי
עֲנִיָּה וּמְרוּדֶיהָ כָּל מַחְמָדֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם בְּנִפְל־
קִרִי׃ מִבֶּת.

The Hebrew title of the book of Lamentations is derived from the opening word *Ekkah* (How). This word commences the first, second, and fourth of the five chapters of the book. It is in accordance with the custom to name a biblical book by a conspicuous word at or near its beginning. *Lamentations* is the third of the five *Megilloth* (scrolls), and is recited in the synagogue on *Tishah b'Av*, the ninth day of *Av*, in commemoration of the Temple. Tradition assigns the composition of *Lamentations* (*Kinoth*) to the prophet Jeremiah, who was an eyewitness to the agony of Jerusalem and the despair of

LAMENTATIONS

I

- 1 How lonely sits the city, once so full of people!
Once great among nations has become like a widow;
Once princess among states has become a vassal.
 - 2 Bitterly she weeps in the night, tears upon her cheeks;
She has no one to comfort her out of all her friends;
All her friends have betrayed her and become her foes.
 - 3 Judah has gone into the misery of exile and harsh servitude;
Settled among the nations, she has found no resting-place;
Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the narrow straits.
 - 4 The roads to Zion mourn, bereft of arriving festive guests;
All her gates are deserted, her priests sigh;
Her maidens are sad, and she is in bitter plight.
 - 5 Her foes are now the masters, her enemies are at ease;
For the Lord has afflicted her because of her many sins;
Her young children have gone as captives before the enemy.
 - 6 All splendor is gone from Zion;
Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture;
They walked feebly before the pursuer.
 - 7 Jerusalem recalls in the days of her woe and sorrow
All the precious things that were hers in former days;
-

its inhabitants during the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 before the common era.

The book of Lamentations consists of five lyric poems, lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. The first four poems are alphabetic acrostics. The twenty-two strophes of chapters 1, 2, and 4 are introduced by the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet taken in order, as if to express the gamut of sorrow, the totality of grief and hope, from A to Z. The alphabetic acrostics are likewise designed to aid the memory of the people in their distant exile. In the first two chapters, each letter of the alphabet introduces a verse of three lines (1:7 and 2:19 have four). Chapter three is intensified with

עֲמָהּ בִּידָגֶר וְאֵין עֹזֶר לָהּ רְאוּהָ צָרִים שִׁחֲקוּ עִלָּה־
 מִשְׁבֹּתֶיהָ: תָּמָא חֲמָאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עֲלֵפֶן לְנִידָה הִתְחָה כָּל־
 מִכְבְּדֶיהָ הִזְלִיחָה כִּירְאוֹ עֲרוּתָה גִסְדִּיָא נֶאֱנָחָה וְתָשֵׁב
 אַחֹר: טָמְאָתָה בְּשׁוּלָהּ לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ וְתָרַד
 פְּלִאִים אֵין מִנְחָם לָהּ רְאָה יְדוּהָ אֶת־עֵנֶי כִי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב:
 יְדוּ פֶרֶשׁ צָר עַל כָּל־מַחֲמֹדֶיהָ כִּירְאָתָה גֻּיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ
 אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָה לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בִּקְהֵל לָךְ: כָּל־עַמָּה נֶאֱנָחִים
 מִבִּקְשִׁים לָחֶם נָתַנוּ מִחֲמוּדֵיהֶם בְּאֶכֶל לְהָשִׁיב נֶפֶשׁ
 רְאָה יְדוּהָ וְהִבִּיטָהּ כִי הִיִּיתִי וְיִלְלָהּ: לֹא אֶלֵיכֶם כָּל־
 עֲבָרֵי דָרְךָ הִבִּישׁוּ וְרָאוּ אִסְדִּישׁ מִכְאוֹב כִּמְכַאֲבִי אֲשֶׁר
 עֹלָל לִי אֲשֶׁר הִוְגָה יְדוּהָ בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפִּי: מִמָּרוֹם
 שָׁלַח־אֵשׁ בַּעֲצַמֹתַי וַיִּחַדְנָה פֶרֶשׁ רֶשֶׁת לְרִנְלֵי הַשִּׁיבֹנִי
 אַחֹר נִתְנַנִּי שְׁמָמָה כָּל־הַיּוֹם יְדוּהָ: נִשְׁקָדָה עַל פְּשָׁעִי
 בְּחֹד יִשְׁמָרְנִי עָלַי עַל־צוּאָתִי הִבְשִׁיל כַּחַד נִתְנַנִּי אֲדֹנִי
 בְּחֹדִי לֹא־אֶבֶל קוֹם: סָלָה כָּל־אֲבִידִי וְאֲדֹנִי בְּקֶרְבִי קָרָא
 עָלַי מוֹעֵד לִשְׁכַר בַּחוּרֵי נֶת דָּבָר אֲדֹנִי לְבָתוּלַת בֶּת־
 יְדוּהָ: עַל־אֵלֶּה וְאֲנִי בּוֹכִיהָ עֵינַי וְעֵינֵי יְדוּהָ מִיָּם כִּי־
 דָּחַק מִמֶּנִּי מִנְחָם מְשִׁיב נֶפֶשִׁי הִיוּ בְּנֵי שׁוֹמְמִים כִּי נָכַר
 אוֹיֵב: פֶּרֶשָׁה צִוִּן בְּדִידָה אֵין מִנְחָם לָהּ צָהָה יְדוּהָ לִיעֲקֹב
 סִבִּיבֵי צָרֵיו הִיִּתָּה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנִידָה בִּיגִיתֶם: צַדִּיק הוּא
 יְדוּהָ בִּרְפִידוֹ מְרִיתִי שְׁמַעְרָנָא כָּל־עַמִּים וְרָאוּ מִכְאֲבִי
 בְּתוֹלְתִי וּבַחוּרֵי הָלָכְנִי בִּשְׁכִי: קָרָאתִי לְמַאֲהֲבֵי הַמָּדָה

קרי: מחפדיהם. העמים.

a triple acrostic, with each letter introducing each of the three successive verses. Chapters two and four have an unusual alphabetic order, with the letter **ד** before the letter **י**. The fifth and last poem is not an alphabetic acrostic; it consists, however, of twenty-two verses, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

- When her people fell helpless into the enemy's hand,
Foes gazed gloating at her downfall.
- 8 Jerusalem sinned greatly, therefore she became an outcast;
All who honored her despise her, for they see her disgrace;
She, too, can only sigh while turning away.
- 9 Impurity clung to her skirts, she gave no thought to her end;
She has dropped miraculously, with no one to comfort her.
Look down, O Lord, upon my affliction; the foe has triumphed!
- 10 The enemy has laid hands on everything dear to her;
She has seen pagans invade her shrine,
Men thou didst forbid to enter thy community.
- 11 All her people sigh, begging for bread;
They have bartered their treasures for food, to keep alive;
Look down, O Lord, and see how gluttonous I have become!
- 12 May it never happen to you, all you wayfarers!
Look about and see if there is an agony like mine,
Which the Lord dealt out to me on the day of his wrath.
- 13 From above he sent a fire down into my bones;
He spread a net for my feet, he has thwarted me;
He has abandoned me desolate, in long-drawn pain.
- 14 Compressed by his hand is the yoke of my offenses;
They are knit together, coming up to my neck;
The Lord consigned me to a foe that I cannot withstand.
- 15 The Lord has flouted all my mighty men in the midst of me;
He has proclaimed a date against me to crush my young men;
In a winepress God has trampled maiden Judah.
- 16 For these things do I weep, tears stream from my eyes;
Far from me is a comforter, reviving my spirit;
My children are forlorn, for the enemy has prevailed.
- 17 Zion spreads her hands out, there is none to comfort her;
The Lord summoned Jacob's enemies round about him;
Jerusalem has become something unclean among them.
- 18 The Lord is in the right, for I did disobey him;
Listen, all you peoples, look at my agony;
My maidens and my youths have gone into captivity!
- 19 I called to my friends, but they deceived me;

רַמִּינִי בְּדָגִי חֲקֹנִי בְּעִיר נָעֻז בְּרִבְקָשׁוֹ אֲבֵל לָמוֹ וְיָשִׁיבוּ
 אֶת־נַפְשָׁם: רָאָה יְהוָה בְּרִצְרָלִי מִצֵּי חֲמֻדָּמוֹ נְהַפְדֹּ
 לִבִּי בְּקֶרְבִּי כִּי מָרוּ מַעֲרִיתִי מִחוּץ שְׂכֵלְהָ חָרַב בְּבֵית
 כְּמוֹת: שָׁמְעוּ כִּי גִאֲחָה אָנִי אֵין מְנַחֵם לִי בְּלֹא־יָבִי
 שָׁמְעוּ רַעְתִּי שָׁשׂוּ כִּי אָתָּה עָשִׂיתָ הַבֹּאֶת יוֹסֶרְקָרְאָתָּ וְיָדָוּ
 כְּמִנִּי: תָּבֹא כָּל־רַעְתָּם לִפְנֵיךָ וְעוֹלָל לָמוֹ בְּאֲשֶׁר עוֹלְלָתָּ
 לִי עַל כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵי בִּרְפוֹת אֲנַחְתִּי וְלִבִּי דָוָּ:

ב

אִיכָּה יָעִיב בְּאִפּוֹ ׀ אֲדַנִּי אֶת־בְּתִצִּיּוֹן הַשְּׁלִיךְ מִשְׁמִימִים
 אֶרֶץ הַפִּאֲרָתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־זָכַר הַדֹּם־רִגְלָיו בְּיוֹם אָפּוֹ:
 בִּלְעַד אֲדָנִי ׀ לֹא חָמַל אֶת כָּל־נְאוֹת יַעֲקֹב הֵבֵם בַּעֲבָרְתוֹ
 מִבְּצָרֵי בֶת־יְהוּדָה הִגִּיעַ לְאֶרֶץ חֲלָל מִמְּלָכָה וְשָׁרִיָּה:
 גָּדַע בְּחִיר־אֶף כָּל קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל הָשִׁיב אַחֹר יָמִינוּ מִפְּנֵי
 אוֹיֵב וַיִּבְעֶר בַּיַּעֲקֹב כָּאֵשׁ לְהִכָּה אֲכָלָה סָבִיב: דָּרַךְ
 קִשְׁתוֹ כְּאוֹיֵב נֶצַח יָמִינוּ כָּצָר וַיַּחֲרֹג כָּל־מַחֲמַד־עֵין בְּאֶהֱלֵ
 בְּתִצִּיּוֹן שָׁפַךְ כָּאֵשׁ חֲמָתוֹ: הִזָּה אֲדָנִי ׀ כְּאוֹיֵב בִּלְעַ
 יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּלְעַד כָּל־אַרְמוֹתֶיהָ שָׁחַת מִבְּצָרָיו וַיִּרְבַּ בְּבֶת־
 יְהוּדָה תְּאֵנִיָּה וְאַנְיָה: וַיְהִי־מָס כַּגֹּן שָׁכַח שָׁחַת מִעֲדוֹ שִׁכַּח
 יְהוָה ׀ בְּצִיּוֹן מוֹעֵד וְשִׁכַּת וַיִּנָּאֵץ בּוֹעֵס־אִפּוֹ מִלֶּךָ וְכֹהֵן:
 וְנָח אֲדָנִי וּמוֹבָחוּ נָאֻר מִקִּדְשׁוֹ הַסִּגִּיר בְּיַד־אוֹיֵב חוֹמַת
 אֲרָמוֹתֶיהָ קוֹל נִתְּנוּ בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כְּיוֹם מוֹעֵד: חָשַׁב
 יְהוָה ׀ לְהַשְׁחִית חוֹמַת בְּתִצִּיּוֹן נָטָה כֹּן לֹא־הָשִׁיב יָדוֹ

קרי: ולא.

The Greek version of the Bible, the Septuagint, begins the book of Lamentations with these words: "After Israel was carried into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremiah sat down and wept, and sang this song of woe over Jerusalem."

- My priests and my elders have died of hunger in the city;
They kept searching for food to keep themselves alive.
- 20 See, O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach writhes;
My heart turns within me, because I did disobey thee;
Outside the sword makes orphans, inside brings death.
- 21 They have heard that I am sighing, but none comforts me;
All my foes have heard of my calamity and rejoiced;
Thou hast done it, thou hast brought the threatened day;
O let them fare like me!
- 22 Let all their evil deeds come before thee;
Do to them as thou hast done to me for all my sins;
For my sighs are many and my heart is sick.

II

- 1 How the Lord in his anger has set maiden Zion under a cloud!
He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel;
He did not remember his footstool in his day of anger.
- 2 The Lord has destroyed ruthlessly the homesteads of Jacob;
In his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of Judah;
He has deeply degraded the kingdom and its princes.
- 3 He has cut down in blazing anger all the force of Israel;
He has withdrawn his right hand in the presence of the enemy;
He has ravaged Jacob like flaming fire devouring all around.
- 4 Like a foe he has bent his bow, standing poised like an enemy;
He has slain all that were a delight to the eye;
In the tent of Zion he has poured out his wrath like fire.
- 5 The Lord has acted like an enemy, he has overwhelmed Israel;
He has laid waste all its palaces, laid in ruins its strongholds;
He has increased mourning and lamentation within Judah.
- 6 He stripped his shrine like a garden, demolished his temple;
The Lord blotted out the memory of feast and sabbath Zion;
In his fierce anger he has spurned king and priest alike.
- 7 The Lord has abandoned his altar, disdained his sanctuary;
He delivered the walls of its mansions into the enemy's hand;
They raised shouts in the Lord's house as on a festive day.
- 8 The Lord designed to destroy the wall of maiden Zion;
He marked it off by the line, refrained not from causing ruin;
He has made rampart and wall to mourn and languish.

מִבֶּלַע וַיֵּאבֶּלֶחַל וְחֹמָה וַיְחַדּוּ אֶמְלָלוּ: טָבְעוּ בָאָרֶץ
שְׁעָרֶיהָ אֶבֶד וְשַׁבָּר בְּרִיחֶיהָ מִלֵּפָה יִשְׁרִיחַ בְּגוֹיִם אֵין
תּוֹרָה גַּם־נִבְיָאֵיהָ לֹא־מָצְאוּ חֻזֹן מִיְהוָה: יָשְׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ
יְדָמּוּ וְקִנּוּ בַת־צִיּוֹן הֶעָלָה עָפָר עַל־רֹאשָׁהּ חֲגָרוּ שַׁקִּים
הוֹרִידוּ לָאָרֶץ רֹאשָׁן בַּתּוֹלֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם: כָּלּוּ בִדְמָוֹת
עֵינֶי חֲמָדָמָיו מִצִּי נִשְׁפָּף לָאָרֶץ כִּבְדִּי עַל־שָׁבֵר בֶּת־
עָמִי בַעֲטָה עוֹלָל וַיּוֹנֵק בְּרַחֲבוֹת קָרְיָה: לְאַמְתָּם יֹאמְרוּ
אֵיךְ דָּגַן וַיֵּין בִּדְחַעֲטָפָם כָּחֲלָל בְּרַחֲבוֹת עִיר בְּהִשְׁתַּפָּף
נַפְשָׁם אֶל־הַיָּק אֲמַתָּם: מִהֲדַעֲוֹדָךְ מָה אֲדַמָּה־לָּךְ הַבֵּת
יְרוּשָׁלַם מָה אֲשׁוּה־לָּךְ וְאַנְתָּמָךְ בַּתּוֹלֶת בַּת־צִיּוֹן כִּי־נִדְוָל
כִּי־ם שִׁבְרָךְ מִי יִרְפָּא־לָּךְ: נִבְיֹאִיךְ חֻזּוֹ לָךְ שׁוֹא וְתַפֵּל
וְלֹא־גָלוּ עַל־עוֹנֶךָ לְהָשִׁיב שְׁבִיתָךְ וַיַּחֲזוּ לָךְ מִשְׁאוֹת שׁוֹא
וּמִדְּחִיִּים: סָפְקוּ עֲלֶיךָ כַּפִּים כֹּל־עֲבָרִי דָרְךָ שָׁרְקוּ וַיִּנְעוּ
רֹאשָׁם עַל־בֵּת יְרוּשָׁלַם הִזָּאת הָעִיר שִׁיאֲמָרוּ בְּלִילֹת יָפִי
מִשׁוֹשׁ לְכֹל־הָאָרֶץ: פָּצוּ עֲלֶיךָ פִּיהֶם כֹּל־אִבְיָךְ שָׁרְקוּ
וַיַּחֲרִקוּ־שׁוֹן אֲמָרוּ בִּלְעֵנוּ אֵךְ זֶה הַיּוֹם שִׁקְוִינָהוּ מִצָּאֵנוּ
רָאִינוּ: עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם בָּצַע אֲמָרְתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צָוָה
מִי־מִלֵּקְדָם הָרָם וְלֹא חָמַל וַיִּשְׁמַח עֲלֶיךָ אוֹיֵב הָרִים קָנָן
צָרִיךְ: צָעַק לָבָם אֶל־אֲדֹנֶי חֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן הוֹרִידִי כִנּוֹחַ
דְּמָעָה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה אֶל־תַּתִּי פּוֹנֵת לָךְ אֶל־תַּתִּים בֶּת־
עֵינֶיךָ: קוֹמִי רִנִּי בְלִיל לְרֹאשׁ אֲשִׁמְרוֹת שִׁפְכִי כַּמִּים
לְבָבְךָ נִכַח פָּנֶי אֲדֹנֶי שְׂאִי אֶלָּיו כִּפְּיךָ עַל־נַפְשִׁי עוֹלָלֶיךָ

קרי' שבומד. בלילה.

It has been said that this elegy, written with sighs and tears, has done its work most effectually in great public calamities, and is doing it every year on Tish'ah b'Av, when it is read in all the synagogues. It keeps alive the memory of the deepest Jewish humiliation and the hope of final deliverance.

- 9 Her gates have sunk to the ground, he has shattered her bars;
Her king and her rulers are among the nations, no more Torah;
Her very prophets receive no vision from the Lord.
- 10 They sit silent on the ground, the elders of maiden Zion;
They cast dust on their heads and dressed in sackcloth;
The girls of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.
- 11 My eyes are spent with tears, my inwards writhe in anguish;
My heart is poured out in grief because of my people's ruin;
When babes and sucklings languish in the streets of the city.
- 12 They cry to their mothers: "Where is bread and wine?"
As they faint like wounded men in the street of the town;
As their life is gasped out in their mothers' bosoms.
- 13 What can I say to you, to what can I compare you, Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you to console you, maiden Zion?
Your disaster is vast as the sea, who can heal you?
- 14 Your prophets envisioned for you falsehood and senselessness;
They did not expose your iniquity to restore your fortunes;
They prophesied to you false and deceptive messages.
- 15 All those who pass along the way clap their hands over you;
They hiss and wag their heads at maiden Jerusalem:
"Is this the city, called perfect in beauty, the joy of all
the earth?"
- 16 All your enemies jeer at you, they hiss and grind their teeth;
They say: "We have destroyed her! Ah, this is the day
We have longed for; we have lived to see it!"
- 17 The Lord did what he planned, he carried out his threat
He had ordained long ago, he demolished without pity;
He let the enemy rejoice over you, and exalted your foes.
- 18 Their heart cried out to the Lord: O wall of maiden Zion,
Let your tears run down like a torrent day and night!
Give yourself no rest, let not your eyes cease to shed tears.
- 19 Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches!
Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord!

הַעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעַב בְּרֹאשׁ כְּלִחוּצוֹת: רָאָה יְהוָה וַתִּבְיָטָה
לִמִּי עוֹלָלָתָ כִּי אִסְתָּאכְלָנָה נָשִׁים פְּרִים עָלָי טַפְחִים
אִסְתָּדְגַנּוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כִּתְּנָן וְנִבְיָא: שָׁכְבוּ לְאַרְצָן הַחַצוֹת
נָעַר חֶמֶן בְּתוֹלְתִי וּבַחֲזוֹרִי נָפְלוּ בַּתְּרֵב הִרְגַּתְּ כּוֹסֵם אֶפְדָּ
טַבַּחְתָּ לֹא חָמַלְתָּ: תִּקְרָא כּוֹסֵם מִזֶּדַּד מִעוֹר מַסְבִּיב וְלֹא
הָיָה כּוֹסֵם אֶת־יְהוָה פָּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד אֲשֶׁר־טַפַּחְתִּי וְרִבִּיתִי
אֲבִי כֻלָּם:

נ

אֲנִי הַנִּזְכָּר רָאָה עָנִי בַּשֶּׁבֶט עֲבַרְתוּ: אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיִּלְךְ
חֶסֶד וְלֹא־אָדָר: אֵךְ כִּי יָשָׁב יִדְפֹּק יְדוֹ כְּלִי־חַיִּים:
בָּלָה בָּשָׂרִי וְעוֹרִי שָׁבַר עֲצָמוֹתַי: בָּגָה עָלַי בִּקְרָא רֹאשׁ
וַתִּלְאַחַח: בַּמַּחֲשָׁבִים הוֹשִׁיבֵנִי כַּמִּתִּי עוֹלָם: נָדָר
בַּעֲדִי וְלֹא אֵצֵא הַכְּבֵד נִחַשְׁתִּי: גַּם כִּי אֶנְעֹק וְאֶשְׁוֹעַ
שָׁתָם תִּפְלֹתַי: נָדָר דְּרָכִי בְּגוֹיֹת נְתִיבַתִּי עוֹדָה: דָּב
אֶרֶב הִיא לִי אֶרֶץ בַּמַּסְתָּרִים: דְּרָכִי סוּרָר וַיִּפְשְׁתָּנִי
שָׁמַי שׁוֹמֵם: דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתוֹ בַּצִּיבָנִי כַּמִּטְרָא לַחֵץ:
הִבִּיא בְּכִלְתִּי בֵּן אֲשָׁפְתוּ: הִוִּיתִי שֹׁחֵק לְכָל־עַמִּי
נִגְיַתָם כְּלִי־חַיִּים: הִשְׁבִּיעֵנִי בַּמִּדְּרוֹרִים הִרְוֵנִי לַעֲנָה:
יִתְּנָם בַּחֲצֹץ שְׁנֵי הַכְּפִישָׁנִי בְּאִפְרָ: וַתִּזְנַח מִשְׁלֹם נַפְשִׁי
נִשְׁתִּי טוֹבָה: וְאָמַר אֶבְדָּ נִצְחִי וַתַּחֲלֵתִי מִיְּדָה:
וְכָרַעֲנִי וּמִדָּחִי לַעֲנָה וְרֹאשׁ: זָכוֹר תִּזְכּוֹר וַתְּשִׁיחַ עָלַי
נַפְשִׁי: זֹאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל־לִבִּי עַל־בֶּן אֹחִיל: חֶסֶד־
יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תָמַט כִּי לֹא־קָלוּ רַחֲמָיו: חֲדָשִׁים לְבָקָרִים

קרי: ארי. תשיח.

The book of Lamentations is chanted to a melody of poignant beauty. The theme is a lament for the sufferings of the Jewish people during and after the destruction of Judea and Jerusalem by the Babylonian hordes of king Nebuchadnezzar.

- Pray to him for the life of your infants,
Who starve at every street corner.
- 20 Consider, O Lord, look! Whom have you treated like this!
Are women to eat their children, the babes of their care?
Should priest and prophet be slain in the Lords sanctuary?
- 21 Both young and old lie in the dust of the streets;
My maidens and my youths have fallen by the sword;
Thou hast slain them in thy anger, slaughtered without pity.
- 22 Thou didst invite, as to a festival, my neighbors round about.
None survived or escaped on the day of the Lord's wrath.
Those whom I nurtured and reared my enemy has destroyed.

III

- 1 I am the man who suffered under the rod of his anger.
2 He has driven me on and on into darkness, without any light.
3 Over and again he turned his hand only against me all day.
4 He has worn away my flesh and skin, and broken my bones.
5 He has built all around me misery and tribulation.
6 He has made me dwell in darkness like men long dead.
7 He walls me in, I cannot get out; he loads me with chains.
8 Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.
9 He blocks my ways with hewn stones, he tangles up my paths.
10 He is a lurking bear to me, a lion in hiding.
11 He forced me off my way, mangled me and made me forlorn.
12 He has bent his bow and made me a target for his arrows.
13 He has driven his shafts home, right into my vitals.
14 I am the butt of all people, the subject of their jibes all day.
15 He has filled me with bitterness, sated me with wormwood.
16 He has broken my teeth with gravel, covered me with ashes.
17 My soul is bereft of peace, I have forgotten happiness.
18 I said: "My strength is lost, and my hope in the Lord."
19 O be mindful of my affliction and distress, bitterness and gall.
20 Remember, O remember, my being is bent down within me.
21 This I call to mind, and therefore I am hoping.
22 The steadfast kindness of the Lord and his mercy never end.
23 They are renewed every morning, great is thy faithfulness.

רָבָה אֲמוֹנָתָהּ: חֲלָקִי יְהוָה אֶמְרָה נִפְשִׁי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל
 לִי: טוֹב יְהוָה לִקְנוֹי לְנֶפֶשׁ תִּדְרָשְׁנִי: טוֹב יְהוָה
 וְדוֹמָם לְתִשׁוּעַת יְהוָה: טוֹב לִגְבוֹר כִּי־יִשָּׂא עַל בְּנֵעוּרָיו:
 יֵשֶׁב בְּדֹד וַיִּדָּם כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו: יִתֵּן בַּעֲפָר פִּידוֹ אוֹלִי
 יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה: יִתֵּן לְמַבְרֵי לְחִי יִשְׁבַּע בַּחֲרָפָה: כִּי לֹא
 יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנִי: כִּי אִסְדּוּנָה וְרַחֵם כָּל־כַּחַסְדּוֹ: כִּי
 לֹא עָנָה מִלְּפִי וַיִּגַּה בְּנִי־אִישׁ: לְדַבָּא תַּחַת רִגְלָיו
 כָּל אֲסִירֵי אֶרֶץ: לְהַמּוֹת מִשְׁפַּט־נָזֵר נֹגֵד פָּנֵי עָלִיו:
 לְעוֹת אֲדָם בְּרִיבֵי אֲדֹנִי לֹא רָאָה: מִי זֶה אָמַר
 וְתִהְיֶה אֲדֹנִי לֹא צָוָה: מִפִּי עָלִיוֹן לֹא תִצָּא הַרְעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב:
 מִה־יִּתְאוּנוֹן אֲדָם חִי גָבַר עַל־חַטָּאוֹ: נִחַפְשָׁה
 דְּרָכֵינוּ וְנַחֲלִנָּה וְנִשְׁוֹבָה עַד־יְהוָה: נִשָּׂא לִבֵּנוּ אֶל־
 כַּפֵּים אֶל־אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם: נִחַנּוּ פִשְׁעֵנוּ וּמִרִינוּ אֶתָּה לֹא
 סָלַחְתָּ: סִבּוֹתָה בָּאֵף וְתִדְרָפְנוּ הַרְגָּת לֹא חֲמַלְתָּ:
 סִבּוֹתָה בַּעֲנָן לֶךְ מִעֲבוֹר תִּפְלָח: סָחִי וּמָאוֹס תִּשְׁמַנּוּ
 בְּקֶרֶב הָעַמִּים: פָּצוּ עָלֵינוּ פִּיהֶם כָּל־אֵיבֵינוּ: פָּחַד
 וּפַחַת הָיָה לָנוּ הַשָּׂאת וְהַשְׁכֵּר: פִּלְגֵי־מִים תַּגֵּד עֵינִי
 עַל־שֹׁכֵר בַּת־עַמִּי: עֵינִי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמָה מֵאֵין
 הַפְּנוֹת: עַד־יִשְׁקוּף וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה מִשָּׁמַיִם: עֵינִי עוֹלִלָה
 לְנֶפֶשׁ מִכָּל בְּנוֹת עִירִי: צוֹד צְדוּנִי בַּצִּפּוֹר אֵיבִי
 הָנֵם: צָמְתִּי בַּבוֹר חַיִּי וַיְהִי־אֲבָן כִּי: צַפּוּר־מִים עַל־

קרי: חקרי. חסאי.

Each of the five poems is complete in itself, forming a well-rounded whole. Though the five chapters contained in the book have the same theme, namely the destruction of Jerusalem, each of them dwells on a different phase of the subject. Four chapters (1, 2, 4, 5) have each twenty-two verses, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3, however, has sixty-six verses, three times twenty-two.

- 24 The Lord is my share, I say, therefore I will hope in him.
25 The Lord is good to those who trust in him,
To a soul that seeks him.
26 It is good to wait in silence for the Lord's help.
27 It is good for a man in his youth to bear a yoke.
28 Let him sit alone and be silent when he has laid it upon him.
29 Let him put his mouth to the dust, there may yet be hope.
30 Let him offer his cheek to the smiter, and be filled with abuse.
31 For the Lord does not reject forever.
32 Though he causes grief, he has mercy in his rich kindness.
33 He does not wilfully bring grief and affliction to mankind.
34 To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth.
35 To deny the right of a man in the presence of the Most High.
36 To wrong a man in his cause—this the Lord does not approve.
37 Who can form a thing when the Lord ordains it not?
38 Are not weal and woe alike decreed by the Most High?
39 Why should a man complain when punished for his sins?
40 Let us search and examine our ways, let us return to the Lord.
41 Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.
42 We transgressed and rebelled, thou hast not pardoned.
43 In anger thou hast pursued us, slaying without pity.
44 Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that no prayer may
pass through.
45 Thou hast made us scum and refuse among the peoples.
46 All our enemies have opened their mouth railing against us.
47 Panic and pitfall are our lot, ravage and ruin.
48 My eyes shed streams of tears for the disaster of my people.
49 My eyes shall flow without cease, without respite.
50 Until the Lord looks down and beholds from heaven.
51 My eyes are sore because of all the maidens of my town.
52 My foes have snared me like a bird without cause.
53 They have cut off my life in a dungeon, and cast stones at me.
54 Waters flowed over my head, I said: "I am lost."

רֹאשִׁי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְזַרְתִּי: קָרָאתִי שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה מִבּוֹר
תַּחְתִּיּוֹת: כֹּלִי שָׁמַעַתְּ אֶל־תַּעֲלֹם אֲוִנֶךָ לְרוּחֹתִי לְשׁוֹעֲתִי:
קָרַבְתָּ בֵּינִים אֶקְרָאֲךָ אָמַרְתָּ אֶל־תִּירָא: רַבַּת אֲדֹנִי
רִיבִי נִפְשִׁי גָּאֵלְתָּ חַיִּי: רָאִיתָה יְהוָה עֲוֹנֹתַי שְׁפֹטָה
מִשְׁפָּטִי: רָאִיתָה כָּל־נִקְמָתָם כָּל־מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם לִי:

שָׁמַעַתְּ חֲרָפָתָם יְהוָה כָּל־מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם עָלַי: שָׁפַתִּי קָמִי
וְהִגִּיתִם עָלַי כָּל־דִּבּוּרִים: שִׁבְתֶּם וְקִימַתֶּם הַבִּיטָה אֵנִי
מִנְּגִינָתָם: תָּשִׁיב לָהֶם גְּמוּלָה יְהוָה כַּמַּעֲשֶׂה יְדֵיהֶם:
תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִגְּנֹת־לֵב תִּאֲלָתֶךָ לָהֶם: תִּדְרֹךְ בָּאָרֶץ וְתִשְׁמִידֵם
מִתַּחַת שְׁמֵי יְהוָה:

ד

אֵיכָה יֵעָם זָהָב יִשְׁנֹא הַכֶּתֶם הַטּוֹב תִּשְׁתַּפְּכֶנָּה אֲבֹנֵי
לֶךְדָּשׁ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצּוֹת: בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיְקָרִים הַמְּסֻלָּאִים
בְּפֶן אֵיכָה נִחַשְׁבוּ לִנְבִל־חֲרָשׁ מַעֲשֶׂה יְדֵי יוֹצֵר: גַּם־
תַּנּוֹן תִּלְצֻ שֹׂד הַיִּנְיָקוֹ וְגִרְתָּן בַּת־עַמִּי לֹאֲכֹר כִּי־עֵינִים
בַּמִּדְבָּר: דָּבַק לְשׁוֹן יוֹנֵק אֶל־חֶבֶן בַּצִּמָּא עֹלָלִים שְׁאֵלוּ
לָחֶם פֶּרֶשׁ אֵין לָהֶם: הָאֲכָלִים לַמַּעֲדָנִים נִשְׁמִי בַּחֻצּוֹת
הָאֲמִנִים עָלִי תוֹלַע חִבְקוֹ אֲשַׁפְּתוֹת: וַיִּגְדֵּל עֵץ בַּת־עַמִּי
מִחֲטָאֵת סָדֶם הַהַפּוּכָה כַּמּוֹרְגָנֶע וְלֹאֲתָלוּ בָּהּ יְדֵיהֶם:
וְכִי נִזְרִיחַ מִשְׁלַג צָחוּ מִחֶלֶב אֲדָמוֹ עֵצִים מִפְּנִינִים סָפִיר
נִזְרָתָם: חֲשֹׁךְ מִשְׁחֹרֶל תִּאָּרֶם לֹא נִכְרוּ בַּחֻצּוֹת צֶפֶד
עוֹרֶם עַל־עֲצָמָם יִבֶּשׁ הָיָה כְּעֵץ: טוֹבִים הָיוּ חִלְלֵי־חֶרֶב

קרי: תנים, כישנים.

The first chapter emphasizes the desolation and misery of Jerusalem, describing it as a widow, and as a tributary, that is: Judah has lost her independence, and there is none to comfort her. The ever-recurring themes are the abandonment of the city by her allies, the distress of her inhabitants,

- 55 I called on thy name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit.
 56 Thou didst hear my plea: Do not close thy ear to my cry.
 57 When I called thee, thou didst come near,
 Thou didst say: "Do not fear."
 58 Thou didst champion my cause, thou didst redeem my life.
 59 Thou didst see, O Lord, my wrongs; judge thou my cause.
 60 Thou hast seen all their revenge, all their designs against me.
 61 Thou hast heard their taunts, O Lord, all their plots against me.
 62 The lips and thoughts of my foes are against me all day long.
 63 Look, whether they sit or stand, I am the butt of their taunts.
 64 Requite them, O Lord, for what they have done.
 65 Give them anguish of heart, thy curse be upon them.
 66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under thy heaven.

IV

- 1 How the gold is dimmed, how tarnished the finest gold!
 The sacred gems are scattered over every street corner.
 2 The precious children of Zion, worth their weight in gold,
 Count no more than crockery, work of a potter's hands!
 3 Even jackels give the breast and suckle their young,
 But my people has turned cruel like ostriches of the desert.
 4 The tongue of the nursling cleaves to the palate for thirst;
 Little children beg for bread, and none gives it to them.
 5 Those who feasted on dainties perish in the streets;
 Those who were reared in purple embrace refuse heaps.
 6 The punishment of my people exceeds that of Sodom,
 Which was overthrown in a moment, without a hand striking it.
 7 Her crowned princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk,
 They were ruddier than rubies, their bodies resembled sapphire.
 8 They are blacker than soot;
 They are not recognized in the streets;
 Their skin shriveled on their bones, it became dry as wood.
 9 Better off were those who died by the sword,

the pride of the enemy. "My friends" (1:19) refers to Zion's foreign allies who failed to help her, as the prophets had warned. In 1:22, Zion fully

מחללי רעב שהם זכו מדקדקים מתעבות שדי: יד-
 נשים רחמניות בשלוי ילדיהן היו לברות למי בשבר
 בתעמי: בלה יהוה את חמתו שפך חרוק אפו ויצת-
 אש בציון ותאכל יסודתיה: לא האמינו מלכי-ארץ וכל
 ישבי חבל כי יבא צר ואזיב בשערי ירושלים: מחטאת
 נביאיה עזת כהגיה השפכים בקרבה דם צדיקים: געו
 עורים בחצות נגאלו בדם בלא זכלו יגעו בלבשתם:
 סורו טמא קראו למי סורו סורו אלהינו כי נצי גם-
 געו אמרו בגוים לא יספו לעור: פני יהוה חלקם לא
 יסוף להביטם פני כהנים לא נשאו זקנים לא חגגו:
 עדינה תכלינה עיניו אל עזרתו הבל בצפיתנו צפינו
 אלנו לא יושע: צדו צעדינו מלכת ברחובתינו קרב
 קצנו מלאו ימינו כרבא קצנו: קלים היו רדפינו מנשרי
 שמים על ההרים דלקנו במדבר ארבו לנו: רוח אפינו
 משיח יהוה נלכד בשחיתותם אשר אמרנו בצלו נחיה
 בגוים: שישי ושמחי בתאדום וישבתי בארץ עין
 גם-עליל תעברכום תשכרי ותתערי: תסעונך בתי-
 ציון לא יוסף להגלותך פקר עונך בתאדום וגיה על-
 חטאתך:

ה

וכר יהוה מה-היה לנו הביט וראה את-הרפתנו:
 נחלתנו נהפכה לזרים בתינו לנכרים: יתומים היונו

קרי: כל זקנים. ערש. יזבת. הבישה.

acknowledges her guilt; nevertheless, she pleads that her enemies and oppressors also be punished for their guilt.

In the second chapter, the agonies of the siege, the despair of the citizens, the terrible scenes due to famine are depicted realistically. The sin of Jerusa-

- Than those who died of hunger;
They were stabbed for want of the products of the fields.
- 10 The hands of tender women have boiled their children;
Such became their food amid the disaster of my people.
- 11 The Lord gave full vent to his wrath, poured out his hot anger;
He lit a fire in Zion which consumed its foundations.
- 12 The kings could not believe, nor any of the world's dwellers,
That foe or enemy could ever enter the gates of Jerusalem.
- 13 It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests,
Who had shed in her midst the blood of the just.
- 14 They wandered blindly through the streets, stained with blood,
So that no men were able to touch their garments.
- 15 "Begone! Unclean!" people shouted at them;
Begone, begone, do not touch, for they are fugitives;
It was said: among the nations they stay shall never more.
- 16 The Lord himself scattered them, caring nothing for them;
No honor was shown to the priests, no favor to the elders.
- 17 Our eyes are still failing, ever watching vainly for help;
We are watching for a nation that cannot help.
- 18 Foes dogged our steps so that we could not walk in our streets;
Our doom is near, our days are over, our end has come.
- 19 Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the sky;
They chased us in the hills, ambushed us in the desert.
- 20 Our breath of life, the Lord's anointed was trapped
in their pits.
We had thought we might live among the nations,
under his shadow.
- 21 Rejoice and be glad, Edom, inhabiting the land of Uz;
The cup will reach you too; you shall be drunk and exposed.
- 22 Your guilt, maiden Zion, is over; he will exile you never again;
Your iniquity, Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins.

V

- 1 Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; behold our disgrace.
2 Our heritage has passed to strangers, our homes to aliens.

אֵין אֵב אִמִּיתִינוּ בְּאַלְמָנוֹת: מִיָּמֵינוּ בְּכֶסֶף שְׁתִּינוּ עֲצֵנו
 בַּמָּחִיר יָבֹאוּ: עַל צוֹאֲרֵנוּ נִרְדְּפֵנוּ יִגְעֵנוּ לֹא הוֹנַח לָנוּ:
 מִצָּרִים נָתַנוּ יָד אֲשׁוּר לְשֹׁבַע לָחֶם: אֲבִיתֵנוּ חָטְאוּ
 אֵינָם אֲנַחְנוּ עֲוֹנִתִידִם סָבְלוּ: עֲבָדִים מָשְׁלוּ בָנוּ פֶּרֶק
 אֵין מִיָּדָם: בְּנִפְשֵׁנוּ נָבִיא לַחֲמֵנוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב הַמִּדְבָּר:
 עֹרְנוּ בַּחֲנוּר נִבְכְּרוּ מִפְּנֵי נִלְעָפוֹת רָעָב: נָשִׁים בְּצִיָּן
 עָנוּ בַּתְּלַת בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה: שָׂרִים בָּיָדָם נָתְלוּ פָנֵי וְקָנִים
 לֹא נִהְדָּרוּ: בַּחוּרִים טָחוּ נָשָׂאוֹ וְנָעָרִים בְּעֶץ כָּשְׁלוּ:
 וְקָנִים מִשְׁעַר שָׁכְתוּ בַּחוּרִים מִנְּיָנָתָם: שָׁכַת מִשְׁוֹשׁ
 לִבֵּנוּ נִהַפֵּךְ לֹאכֵל מְחוּלָנוּ: נִפְלָה עֲטָרַת רֹאשֵׁנוּ אִיר
 נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטְאוּ: עַל־זֶה הָיָה דָּוָה לִפְנֵי עַל־אֱלֹהֵי חֲשָׁבוֹ
 עֵינֵינוּ: עַל תִּרְצִיּוֹן שְׁשָׁמָם שׁוֹעֲלִים הַלְכְּרָבוּ: אֶתְהָ
 יְדוּהָ לְעוֹלָם תִּשָּׁב כַּסָּאָה לְדָד וְדָד: לָמָּה לִנְצַח
 תִּשְׁקָחֵנוּ תַּעֲזֹבֵנוּ לָאָרֶץ יָמִים: הִשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 וְנִשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ בְּקָדָם: כִּי אִם־מָאֵס מְאִסְתֵּנוּ קִצְפָּתָהּ
 עָלֵינוּ עַד־מָאֵד:

הִשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְנִשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ בְּקָדָם:

קרי: ואין. ולא. ואינם. נאנחתי. ונשוקה.

lem, especially of her false prophets, is held up to view. The unity of the book of Lamentations is said to be found in its attitude toward suffering. It proclaims that suffering is the inevitable result of persistent sin. The people are urged to turn to God in supplication, so that he will turn and be gracious to them. In 2:20, where the inhuman condition of cannibalism is mentioned as a result of extreme famine in a besieged city, one may recall the description in II Kings (6, 26-29), where we read: "This woman said to me: Let us have your boy to eat today and tomorrow we will eat your boy..."

- 3 We have become fatherless; our mothers are like widows.
- 4 We buy our water we drink, our wood we get at a price.
- 5 We are pursued with a yoke on our neck, we toil and get no rest.
- 6 We hold out a hand to Egypt, to Assyria, to get enough bread.
- 7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their guilt.
- 8 Slaves now lord it over us, with none to rescue us.
- 9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives,
Because of the sword in the wilderness.
- 10 Our skin glows like an oven, with the fever heat of famine.
- 11 Women were ravished in Zion, maidens in the towns of Judah.
- 12 Princes hanged by them, no respect was shown to elders.
- 13 Young men must carry millstones,
Youths stagger with loads of wood.
- 14 Elders have quit the city gate, the young men their music.
- 15 The joy of our hearts has ceased,
Our dancing is turned to mourning.
- 16 The crown has fallen from our head;
Woe to us, for we have sinned!
- 17 Because of this our heart is sick, our eyes have grown dim.
- 18 For Mount Zion, which lies desolate, jackels roam over it.
- 19 But thou, O Lord, art enthroned forever,
Thy throne endures through the ages.
- 20 Why dost thou quite forget us, forsaking us so long?
- 21 Restore us to thyself, O Lord, let us return;
Renew our days as of old.
- 22 Unless thou hast utterly rejected us,
Being exceedingly angry with us.

Restore us to thyself, O Lord, let us return;
Renew our days as of old.

The third chapter is the most elaborate in structure and the most sublime in thought of all. It is but little longer than the other chapters of the book, even though it consists of sixty-six verses, three consecutive verses being built upon each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Chapter four closely resembles in structure chapter three. There are two main divisions, containing a description of the sufferings occasioned by famine and the punishment of priests and prophets, king and courtiers.

The fifth and final chapter is a meditation, with no trace of vindictiveness. It is not an alphabetic acrostic, even though it is divided into twenty-two verses. After the last verse, it is customary to repeat the preceding verse, being considered one of good omen.

קֹהֶלֶת

א

דְּבַרִי קֹהֶלֶת בְּדָוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם: הֵבֵל הַבָּלִים
אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הֵבֵל הַבָּלִים הֵבֵל הַבָּל: מִדִּיּוֹתָיו לָאָדָם
בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעָמָל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: דּוֹר הֹלֵךְ וְדוֹר בָּא
וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֲמֹדֶת: וְחֶרֶץ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וּבֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֵל־
מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף וּזְרָח הוּא שֵׁם: הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב
אֶל־צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב. סֹבֵב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ וְעַל־סְבִיבוֹתָיו שָׁב
הָרוּחַ: כָּל־הַנִּחָלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מִלֵּא
אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנִּחָלִים הַלְכִים שָׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לִלְכֹּת: כָּל־
הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים לֹא־יִכָּל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר לֹא־תִשְׁבַּע עֵץ
לְרֹאוֹת וּלְאִתְמָלֵא אֵין מִשְׁמַע: מִדִּשְׁתִּיהָ הוּא שִׁיחָהּ
וּמִדִּשְׁנִיעָהּ הוּא שִׁיעָשָׁה וְאֵין כָּל־חֵדֶשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:
יֵשׁ דְּבָר שִׁיאָמַר רֵאדִּיחָה חֵדֶשׁ הוּא כָּבֹד הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ: אֵין זָכְרוֹן לְרֹאשִׁינִים וְגַם לְאַחֲרֹנִים
שִׁיחֵיו לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם וּכְרוֹן עִם שִׁיחֵיו לְאַחֲרֹנָה:

The book of Koheleth has been described as one of the most charming books of antiquity. This noble and profoundly modern book should be read

KOHELETH

I

The words of Koheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, says Koheleth, utterly vain, everything is vain. What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? One generation passes and another generation comes, while the world stays on forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, then it strives on to its place to rise again. The wind blows toward the south, then it turns toward the north; round and round goes the wind, turning and returning on its track. All the streams flow to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they keep flowing again. All things are weary beyond man's description; the eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be; what has been done is what will be done; nothing is new under the sun. One may say of something: "See, this is new!" It has already been in the ages before us. Those of old are not remembered, nor will the recent be remembered by those who come after them.

by all men carefully every day. It seemingly consists of contradictory theses concerning the highest problems of ethics, and is unique in the whole range of biblical literature. Identified with King Solomon, it contains twelve chapters of observations and maxims on the purpose of life. There is nothing grander than its survey of pain and pleasure, failure and success; no poem works more indomitably for spiritual illumination.

The Greek title of the book, *Ecclesiastes*, is a translation of the Hebrew name *Koheleth*, denoting perhaps one who convenes and addresses an assembly (*kahal*). However, the book does not consist of public speeches, but is a treatise on the theory that history and nature move in a circle. Similar views were held by ancient philosophers. Marcus Aurelius wrote: "They that come

אֲנִי קִהַלְתִּי הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם: וְנָתַתִּי
 אֶת־לִבִּי לְדָרוֹשׁ וּלְתוֹר בְּחִכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַחַת
 הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא: עֲנִנְךָ נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבִּנִי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוּת
 בּוֹ: רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְהִנֵּה
 הַכֹּל הֵבֵל וְרֵעוֹת רֹחַ: מַעֲנוֹת לֹא־יֻכָּל לַתְּקוֹן וְחִסְרוֹן
 לֹא־יֻכָּל לְהַמְנוֹת: דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לִבִּי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי הִנֵּה
 הִגִּדְלָתִי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חִכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵי עַל־
 יְרוּשָׁלַם וּלְבִי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חִכְמָה וְדַעַת: וְאַתָּה לִבִּי
 לַדַּעַת חִכְמָה וְדַעַת הַלְלוֹת וְשַׁבְּלוֹת יְדַעְתִּי שְׁנִים־זֶה הוּא
 רַעְיוֹן רֹחַ: כִּי בִרְבַּח חִכְמָה רַב־כֶּסֶם וְיוֹסֵף דַּעַת יוֹסֵף
 מִכֶּאֱבִיב:

ב

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לִכְהֲנָא אֲנִסְכָּה בְּשִׁמְחָה וּרְאָה בְּטוֹב
 וְהִנֵּה נִם־הוּא הַכֹּל: לְשִׁחּוֹק אָמַרְתִּי מְהִילָל וּלְשִׁמְחָה
 מְהִינָה עָשִׂה: תַּרְתִּי בְּלִבִּי לְמִשְׁוֹךְ בֵּינִי אֶת־בִּשְׁרִי וּלְבִי
 נִהַג בְּחִכְמָה וּלְאַחֲזוֹ בְּסִכְלוֹת עַד: אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה אִי־זֶה
 טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסֵּפֶר יָמֵי
 חַיֵּיהֶם: הִגִּדְלָתִי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנֵיתִי לִי בָתִּים נִטְעָתִי לִי בְרָמִים:
 עָשִׂיתִי לִי נָגוֹת וּפְרִדָּסִים וְנִטְעָתִי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־פְּרִי:

after us will see nothing new, and they who went before us saw nothing more than we have seen." This is reminiscent of the expression that there is nothing new under the sun (אֵין כֵּל חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ). According to some, science cannot discover anything really new; it only elaborates thoughts which are age-old possessions of mankind.

I, Koheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to seek and search out thoughtfully all that is done under heaven: it is a bleak task that God has allotted to human beings to be engrossed in. I have seen all things that are done under the sun: it is all vain and futile. What is twisted cannot be straightended; what is lacking cannot be numbered.

I said to myself: "I have acquired great wisdom, more than anyone who preceded me over Jerusalem; my mind has broad experience of wisdom and knowledge. I have applied my mind to knowledge and wisdom as well as to mad folly. I know now that both are futile. The more wisdom, the more suffering; the more one knows, the more one aches."

II

I said to myself: "Come now, let me try you with pleasure and have a good time!" But this too turned out to be of no use. Merrymaking, I decided, is madness; as for pleasure, what does it accomplish? I searched in my mind how to pamper my body with wine while my reason pursued wisdom, to lay hold on folly so as to see what is best for men to do beneath the sky during the brief span of their lives. I undertook great works, I built myself houses, I planted vineyards, I made for myself gardens and parks and planted in them trees bearing all sorts of fruit. I constructed

The twelve chapters of Koheleth may be briefly outlined as follows: vanity of earthly things; vanity of wisdom; vanity of pleasure; wisdom and folly compared; vanity of toil; the unchanging order of events; the uncertainty of the future; social disorder; reverence for God; perverted justice; vanity of riches; vanity of desires; wisdom and folly contrasted; the world an enigma; women; obedience to rulers; the same lot for all; the uncertainty of fortune; proverbs; youth; old age; epilogue. Following are several ideas of Koheleth:

The life of man is short, saddened by the monotonous repetition which surrounds him. In order to obtain relief, various methods may be tried, the noblest of which is the pursuit of wisdom. Man's insight into the divine plan

עשיתי לי ברכות מים להשקות מהם יצר צומח עצים:
 קניתי עבדים ושפחות ובגרבית היה לי גם מקנה בקר
 וצאן הרבה היה לי מכל שהיו לפני בירושלם: בנסתי
 לי גם-בסוף ודוב וסגלת מלכים והמדינות עשיתי לי
 שרים ושורות ותענוגות בני האדם שדה ושדות: וגדלתי
 והוספתי מכל שהיה לפני בירושלם אף חכמתי עמדה
 לי: וכל אשר שאלו עיני לא אצלתי מהם לא-מנעתי
 את-לבי מכל-שמחה ב-לבי שמח מכל-עמלי וזה-היה
 חלקי מכל-עמלי: ופניתי אני בכל-מעשי שעשו ידי
 ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות והנה הכל הכל ורעות רוח
 ואין יתרון תחת השמש: ופניתי אני לראות חכמה
 והוללות וסבלות כי מה האדם שיבוא אחרי המלך
 את אשר-כבר עשהו: וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה
 מן-הסבלות ביתרון האור מן-החשך: החכם עיניו בראשו
 והבסיל בהשך הולך וידעתי גם-אני שמקרה אחד יקרה
 את-כלם: ואמרתי אני בלבי במקרה הבסיל גם-אני
 יקרני ולמה חכמתי אני או יתר ודברתי בלבי שגם-זה
 הכל: כי אין וברון לחכם עם-הבסיל לעולם בשכר

of the universe is extremely limited. Longevity only increases human suffering. Greed is unsatisfying and futile. The best course is to alternate toil with enjoyment, to use what we have and accept the limitations. The wise and the rich, as well as the strong, are mere puppets of chance. The talk of fools is wordy and wearisome.

Koheleth conducted on himself a variety of experiments in living, noted their results and concluded: All is vain and meaningless. Riches and pleasure

reservoirs to irrigate the plantation of young trees. I bought slaves and slave girls, in addition to the servants I had within my household; I possessed also large herds and flocks, more than any men who preceded me in Jerusalem. I amassed also silver and gold, treasure owned by kings and states. I provided myself with male and female singers, with all human luxuries, and with many a mistress. I became great and exceeded all my predecessors in Jerusalem; also my wisdom stayed with me. I denied my eyes nothing they desired to see; I did not deprive my heart of any joy. Indeed, my heart drew pleasure from all my activities, and this was my share resulting from all my efforts. But when I turned around to consider all the works that I had accomplished, and the energy I had expended in doing them, it was clear that all of it was vanity and futility. There is nothing gained under the sun.

Then I turned to look at wisdom, foolishness and ignorance. Indeed, what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. I had an idea that wisdom excels ignorance as light excels darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the ignorant man walks in darkness. But then I realized that one lot befalls all men, I said to myself: "I shall meet the same fate as the ignorant; why then should I have attained more wisdom?" So I concluded in my mind that this too is futility. Indeed, there is no lasting memory either of the wise or the ignorant; in days to come both will have been forgotten. How is

do not avail; existence is monotonous; enjoyment is a fleeting experience. Life's riddle is beyond human ability to solve. Wealth does not yield happiness; at death, it is left to people who have not toiled to acquire it.

Koheleth recommends patience, endurance and discretion. He examines the value of wisdom, wealth and pleasure, counseling wholesome work combined with reasonable pleasures, since there is no telling when the end comes.

Differing considerably in language and style from the other books of the Hebrew Bible, *Koheleth* is composed of vivid utterances concerning the

הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים הַכֹּל נִשְׁכָּח וְאֵדָּ נִמּוּת הַחֶכֶם עִם־הַבְּסִיל:
וְשִׁנֵּאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הִבֵּל הִבֵּל וְרֵעוּת רֹחַ: וְשִׁנֵּאתִי אֶנִּי אֶת־כָּל־
עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאֲנִידֹנוּ לָאָדָם שִׁיחָה
אַחֲרָי: וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הַחֶכֶם יְהִי אֹסֶךְ וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־
עֲמָלִי שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי וְשֶׁהִכְמַתִּי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הִבֵּל:
וּסְבוּתִי אֲנִי לֹאֲשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הָעֹמֵל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי תַּחַת
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמְלוּ בַּחֲכָמָה וּבִדְעוּת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן
וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל־בּוֹ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הִבֵּל וְרַעַה
רַבָּה: כִּי מִהִדְהוּהָ לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבִכְרִיעוֹן לְבּוֹ שֶׁהוּא
עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מִכְאוּבִים וְכַעַם עֲנִיּוֹ
גַם־כְּלִיָּלָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לְבּוֹ גַם־זֶה הִבֵּל הוּא: אֵין־טוֹב
בָּאָדָם שֶׁיֵּאכַל וְשִׁתָּה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־
זֶה רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִדַּ הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא: כִּי מִי יֵאכַל וּמִי
יְהִישׁ הָרֶץ מִמֶּנִּי: כִּי לְאָדָם שְׂטוּב לְפָנָיו נָתַן הַכֶּמֶה וְדַעַת
וְשִׁמְתָה וְלֹהִטָא נָתַן עֲנִין לְאִסְפָּא וְלִכְנוּס לְתַת לְמוֹזֵב
לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־זֶה הִבֵּל וְרֵעוּת רֹחַ:

pursuit of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, labor; and refers to the plight of the oppressed and the lonely, the despotism in government and the infirmities of old age.

The phrase **תחת השמש** (under the sun), expressing the earthly scene of human activities and events, is found twenty-nine times in Koheleth. It is a variant of **תחת השמים** (under the heaven), which occurs three times in the book (1:13; 2:3; 3:1).

The phrase **רעות רוח**, in the sense of fruitless chasing the wind, occurs seven times in Koheleth. To reach a desirable goal is, in the opinion of

it, the wise man dies as well as the fool! So I came to hate life, because the work that is done under the sun displeased me; all is vanity and futility.

I came to detest all that I had toiled for under the sun, which I must leave to the man who is to come after me. Who knows whether he will be wise or ignorant? Yet he will have control over all the fruits of my toil and wisdom under the sun. This too is futility. So once again I turned to despair about all my efforts under the sun. Here is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and he must hand over what he possesses to a person who has not worked for it. This too is futility, and a great evil. For, what good does a man get out of all his toil and stress of heart with which he labors under the sun? He spends all his days in pains and grief; his mind is not at rest even at night. This too is futility.

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and enjoy himself in his work. Even this, I realized, is from the hand of God. For, apart from me, who should eat, who should enjoy? Indeed, to a man who pleases him God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to leave it to the man who pleases God. This also is futility and a striving after wind.

Kohleth, as hopeless as catching the wind; it is elusive to the grasp as air itself. Newton spoke of himself as a child picking up a few pebbles on the shore of the wide sea of knowledge. The more the veil is lifted, the wider is seen the extent of what is still unknown.

The word *hevel*, in the sense of mere breath or vanity, occurs thirty eight times in the book of Kohleth, stressing the idea that all things in life are transitory. Events strike us as new because previous generations have been swept into oblivion. Rarely do the memories of famous men survive them, indeed.

The world is full of trouble; the weak are oppressed by the strong. What we gain by toil is marred by the hostility of the less fortunate. The toil of the avaricious is insatiable, even when he has none to share his wealth or to succeed him. Even though a man may rise from the lowest to the highest station by wisdom, there is no permanence.

ג

לכל זמן ועת לכל־הפז תסת השמים:

עת ללדת	ועת למות
עת למצת	ועת לעקור נמוצ :
עת להרוג	ועת לרפוא
עת לפרוץ	ועת לבנות :
עת לבבות	ועת לשחוק
עת ספוד	ועת רקוד :
עת להשליך אבנים	ועת בנוס אבנים
עת לחבוק	ועת לרחק מחבק :
עת לבקש	ועת לאפר
עת לשמור	ועת להשליך :
עת לקרוע	ועת לתפור
עת לחשות	ועת לדבר :
עת לאהב	ועת לשנא
עת מלהמה	ועת שלום :

מה־יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל: ראיתי את־הענין
אשר נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו: את־הכל
עשה יפה בעתו גם את־העלם נתן בלבם מבלי אשר

Excess in words shows a person's foolishness. Though vows are not essential, they are binding once they are made. Avarice is never content. The wise and the ignorant, the rich and the poor find imperfect satisfaction in life.

A man's life cannot be considered happy before its end is reached. Wisdom and money are both valuable, but wisdom is the better of the two. Wisdom is

III

Everything has its season; there is a time for every matter under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

A time to plant, and a time to uproot what has been planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to lament, and a time to dance;

A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to seek, and a time to lose;

A time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to mend;

A time to be silent, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

A time for war, and a time for peace.

What does the worker gain by what he exerts himself? I have considered the sore task which God assigned to men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; he has also set the world in their hearth, without man's discovering what it

possessed of a quickening power which money cannot produce. Excess in any direction and folly are likely to disturb and shorten life. Be wise enough not to be over-sensitive to criticism.

You may dig a pit to entrap your enemy, and then fall into it yourself. Prudence is needed in many applications. In pulling down a fence, if you are not careful, a serpent lodging in the crannies may bite you.

Show kindness (cast your bread) even where a return is least to be expected. A blessing, though long delayed, is likely to result. Be not niggardly in bestowing favors; you may need them yourself. Existence has its pleasures, but its span is short. The brevity of life should be a motive for enjoying it while it lasts. The knowledge that sinful indulgence will be punished should check excess in youthful behavior.

לֹא-מֵצָא הָאָדָם אֶת-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֵאשִׁית
וְעַד-סֵף: יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם-לְשֹׂמֵחַ וּלְעֹשֹׂת
טוֹב בַּחַיִּיו: וְגַם כָּל-הָאָדָם שִׂיאֵכֶל וְשָׂתָה וְרָאָה טוֹב
בְּכָל-עֲמָלוֹ מִמַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא: יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָל-אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה
הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְשֵׁלֶם עָלָיו אֵין לְחֹסֶף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין
לִגְרַע וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שִׁירָאֵי מִלְּפָנָיו: מִה־שָׂדֶה כָּבֵד
הוּא וְאֲשֶׁר לַהֲיוֹת כָּבֵד הִנֵּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת-נִרְדָּף:
וְעַד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ מְקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע
וּמְקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע: אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי אֶת-הַצֶּדִּיק
וְאֶת-הָרָשָׁע יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים בִּדְעַת לְבַל-חֲפֹץ וְעַל כָּל
הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֵׁם: אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי עַל-דְּבַרְתִּי בְּנֵי הָאָדָם
לְכָרֶם הָאֱלֹהִים וּלְרֹאִיתִי שֶׁהִם-בִּהְמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם: כִּי
מְקַרָּה בְּנֵי-הָאָדָם וּמְקַרָּה הַבְּהֵמָה וּמְקַרָּה אֶחָד לָהֶם
בְּמִית וְהֵן מוֹת וְהֵן רֹחַ אֶחָד לְכָל וּמִיֹּתֵר הָאָדָם מִן
הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין כִּי הַכֹּל הַכֹּל: הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל-מְקוֹם אֶחָד
הַכֹּל הִנֵּה מִן-הַעֲפָר וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל-הַעֲפָר: מִי יוֹדֵעַ רֹחַ
בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הַנֶּעְלָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה וְרֹחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַנִּרְדָּת
הִיא לְמַטָּה לָאָרֶץ: וְרֹאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂמָה
הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו כִּי-הוּא חָלָקוֹ כִּי מִי יִבְיָאֵנִי לְרֹאוֹת בְּמָה
שִׁדְיָה אַחֲרָיו:

Koheleth has found that wisdom, culture, pleasure are good, but there is still something lacking: they do not explain the mystery of existence. Wisdom lies in adapting ourselves to the designs of God, who is the God of order. The events between birth and death make up the sum of human existence. God allots to all men a season for all that life has appointed for them.

is that God has done from beginning to end. I do know that there is nothing better for men than to enjoy themselves as long as they are alive. When a man can eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his efforts, it is a gift from God. I know that whatever God does endures forever; to it nothing can be added, and from it nothing can be taken away. God has made it so, that men should revere him. That which was, has been ever since; and that which is to be, has already been. God is ever seeking out what has been driven away.

Another thing I observed under the sun, that where justice should bear sway, there is wickedness; where uprightness should be found, there is evil. I said to myself: God will judge both the just and the wicked, since there is a time for everything and every action. I said to myself, with regard to human beings: God causes them to see that they are no better than animals. The fate of men and the fate of animals are the same; as one dies, so dies the other; all have the same life breath; man has no advantage over the beast, for all is vanity. All are bound for the same place; all have come from the dust, and all are returning to the dust. Who can be sure that the human breath of life ascends on high, and the animal breath of life goes down earthward? So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to be happy in what he is doing, for this is his lot; indeed, who can bring him to see what will be after him?

The mass of human suffering and the absence of pity are such that better off are the dead and still more the unborn. Man is disturbed and perplexed by his own perversity. The world is full of trouble. The weak are oppressed by the strong. Success involves envy. It is better to be secure and at peace.

Koheleth illustrates the advantages of companionship. Unitedly men may effect what singly they cannot accomplish, while they enjoy their gains better together than alone. The efforts of the lonely man to attain wealth are vain. There is safety and comfort in the possession of a friend.

Accumulation of wealth is vain, since it brings little pleasure and much anxiety. Sometimes wealth is accumulated by labor and lost by misfortune,

ד

ושבתי אני ואראה את כל העשקים אשר נעשים תחת
 השמש והנה | דמעת העשקים ואין להם מנוח ומנוח
 עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנוח: ושבתי אני את הדמתי
 שכבר מתו מן החיים אשר המה חיים עדנה: וטוב
 משניהם את אשר עין לא ראתה אשר לא ראה את
 המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש: וראיתי אני
 את כל עמל ואת כל כשרון המעשה כי היא קנאת איש
 מרעהו נסוזה הכל ורעות רוח: הבסיל חבק את ידיו
 ואכל את בשרו: טוב מלא כף נחת ממלא הפנים עמל
 ורעות רוח: ושבתי אני ואראה הכל תחת השמש: יש
 אחד ואין שני גם בן ואח אדלו ואין קץ לכל עמלו גם
 ינינו לאתשבע עשר ולמי | אני עמל ומחסר את נפשי
 מטובה נסוזה הכל וענן רע הוא: טובים השנים מן
 האחד אשר ידלגה שגר טוב בעמלם: כי אדפלו
 האחד יקים את חברו ואילו האחד שיפל ואין שני
 לדקומו: גם אדשכבו שנים וחם להם ולאחד ארץ
 חם: ואסיתקפו האחד השנים יעמרו נגדו והחוט
 המשלש לא במהרה יתקן: טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך
 וכן ובסיל אשר לא ידע לדוהר עוד: ברמבית הסורים
 נא למלך כי גם במלכותו נולד רש: ראיתי את כל

so that the possessor has no enjoyment out of it. It is best to eat and drink
 and enjoy life without too much reflection. The wise, no less than the fools, the
 poor equally with the rich, find imperfect satisfaction in life.

IV

Again I considered all the acts of oppression practised here under the sun; there are the oppressed in tears with none to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there is power, and there is none to console them! So I deemed the dead, who are already dead, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive. Better off than either is he who has not yet been, who has not witnessed the evil that is practised under the sun.

Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work mean envy between man and man. This too is futility and a striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. Better one handful with contentment than two handfuls with toil and futile effort. I saw another futile thing under the sun: a person who has nobody, no companion, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, without satisfying himself with wealth; [he never asks himself]: "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is futility and a miserable task.

Two are better than one; they get a better return for their work. If either falls, his companion helps him up; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no other person to help him up. Again, if two sleep together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? If one [foe] attacks either, the two can resist him. A three-ply cord is not quickly broken.

Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but ignorant king, who no longer knows how to be careful. Out of prison one has come to be king in the very kingdom where he was born in poverty. I watched all the living under the sun flocking to the side of

God sometimes gives the means of enjoying life, but withholds the power of enjoyment. A life without enjoyment is protracted misery ending in death. Toil is for the appetite which is insatiable; the wise are no better off than the fools. The destiny of man has been determined for him; he cannot struggle against it, nor does he know what is good for him.

a second youth who was to replace him. Endless numbers of people [applauded him] more than anyone in the past; yet, those of a later generation will not be happy with him. Indeed, this too is futility and a striving after wind.

Watch your step when you go to the house of God, and be ready to learn; it is better than the offering of sacrifice by the ignorant, who know not when they do wrong.

V

Be not hasty with your mouth, and let not your heart be quick to utter a word before God; for God is in heaven, and you are on earth; so let your words be few. Dreams come with many cares, and a fool's voice with many words. When you make a vow to God, delay not paying it. He is displeased with fools; pay what you vow. Better not vow at all than vow and fail to pay. Let not your mouth make you guilty; do not tell the messenger that it was an error; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? Like so many empty dreams are so many empty words; revere God.

When you see the poor being oppressed, when right and justice are perverted in the country, be not surprised, for the high official is being watched by his superior, and above these are others higher still. The total advantage of a country is a king who makes himself servant to the land.

A lover of money will never be satisfied with money; whoever loves wealth reaps no fruit from it; this is futility. The more the

אל תבהל על פִּיךָ is interpreted by Rashi as a warning against accusing God who permits disasters or misfortunes to occur in the world. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, in his philosophic work *Kuzari*, declares that a person who is convinced of the Creator's justice and wisdom will pay no attention to apparent cases of divine injustice on earth. Ibn Ezra and others interpret the verse as relating to man's prayers. God in heaven should be addressed in lucid, brief language. The fool is possessed of too many words, which obscure the message that he desires to convey.

בְּרִבּוֹת הַטּוֹבָה רָבוּ אִיכָלֶהָ וּמִה־בִּשְׂרֹן לִבְעָלָהּ כִּי
 אִם־רֹאִית עֵינָיו: מִתּוֹקָה שְׁנַת הָעֶבֶד אִם־מֶגֶט וְאִם־
 הַרְבֵּה יֹאכֵל וְהַשֶּׁבַע לַעֲשִׂיר אֵינֶנּוּ מֵנִיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן: יֵשׁ
 רֵעָה חוֹלָה רֹאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ עֹשֶׂה שְׂמֹר לִבְעָלָיו
 לְרֵעֵתוֹ: וְאֶבֶד הַעֶשֶׂר הָהוּא בַּעֲנָן רֵעַ וְהַיֶּלֶד בֶּן וְאִין
 בִּידוֹ מֵאִמָּה: כֹּאשֶׁר יָצָא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרוֹם וְשׁוֹב לְלִבָּת
 בִּשְׂבָא וּמֵאִמָּה לֹא־יֵשָׂא בְּעֻמְלוֹ שִׁילָךְ בִּידוֹ: וְגִסְדוֹ
 רֵעָה חוֹלָה כְּלֻעַמַת שְׂבָא בֶּן יֶלֶד וּמִה־חֶרֶן לוֹ שֶׁעֲמַל
 לָרוּחַ: גַּם כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֲשָׁד יֹאכֵל וְכַעַס הַרְבֵּה וְהָלַץ
 וְקָצַף: הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רֹאִיתִי אֲנִי טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפָה לֹאכֹל
 וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שֶׁעֲמַל תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
 מִסֶּפֶר יִמֵּי־חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־הוּא חֲלָקוֹ:
 גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה וְנִכְסִים
 וְהוֹשִׁילָמוֹ לֹאכֵל מִמֶּנּוּ וְלִשְׂאֹת אֶת־חֲלָקוֹ וְלִשְׂמֹחַ בְּעֲמָלוֹ
 זֶה מִתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא: כִּי לֹא הַרְבֵּה חָכַר אֶת־יָמָיו חַיָּו
 כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲנֶה בְּשִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ:

ו.

יֵשׁ רֵעָה אֲשֶׁר רֹאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְרֵבָה הִיא עַל־הָאָדָם:
 אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁל וְנִכְסִים וְקָבֹד וְאֵינֶנּוּ
 חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יִתְּאוֹהָ וְלֹא־יִשְׁלֹטֵנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים
 לֹאכֵל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ נִכְרִי יֹאכֲלֵנוּ וְהַהֵבֶל וְחֲלִי רָע הוּא:

Koheleth finds sincerity rare among men, but among women still more rare. God made man straight, but man endlessly invents subtle and vain attempts to attain happiness. כִּי־רֵעָה רֹאִיתִי.

gain, the more there are to consume it; what advantage has the owner, then, except looking on? Sweet is the worker's sleep whether he has much to eat or little; but the full stomach of the rich man does not let him sleep.

I have observed a painful evil under the sun: wealth hoarded by its owner to his hurt. Should that wealth be lost in a bad venture, the man has nothing to leave to the son he has begotten. Naked he came from his mother's womb, and naked he must return, as he came; for all his toil, he has nothing to take with him. This too is a sore evil, that as he came so he must go; what does he gain by all his futile toil? He spent all his days in gloominess, deep anxieties, sickness and wrath.

Here is what I consider now as good and right for man: to eat and drink and enjoy himself, as he toils on at his work under the sun, during the few years of his life which God has granted him; such is his lot. It is God's own gift when any man, to whom God has given riches and possessions and enabled him to partake of them, consumes his share and is happy in his work. He will never brood over the shortness of his life when God keeps his mind busy with the joy of his heart.

VI

There is one evil which I have observed under the sun; it bears heavily upon man: there is the man to whom God grants riches, possessions and honor, so that he lacks none of all the things he desires; yet God does not grant him the power to partake of it; a stranger enjoys it instead. This is futility indeed, a

Elsewhere (Proverbs 31:10-31), we find one of the most beautiful descriptions of the perfect housewife, trusted by her husband and admired by the people. She is kind to the poor and gentle to all; she is self-respecting and dignified. Husband and children praise her as the source of their happiness.

אם-יוליד איש מאה ושנים רבות יחיה ורב | שידיו
 ימ-שניו ונפשו לאתשבע מדהפורה ונסקבורה לאר
 היתה לו אכרתי טוב ממנו הנפל: כרבהכל בא ובחשך
 ילך ובחשך שמו יבסה: גם-שמש לא-ראה ולא ידע
 גתת לזה מזה: ואלו חיה אלה שנים פעמים וטובה
 לא ראה הלא אל-מקום אחד הכל חולך: כל-עמל האדם
 לפדיו וגם-הנפש לא תמלא: כי מה-יותר לחכם מן
 הבסיל מה-לעני ידע לחלך נגד החכים: טוב מראה
 צנים מהלך-נפש גם-נה הכל ורעות רוח: מה-שהיה
 כבר נקרא שמו ונדע אשר-הוא אדם ולא-יכל לזון
 עם שהתקוף ממנו: כי ישיב-ברים הרבה מרבים הכל
 מה-יתר לאדם: כי מי-ידע מה-טוב לאדם בנדים
 מספר ימיתו הכל ונעשם כצל אשר מרגיד לאדם
 מה-יהיה אחריו תחת השמש:

ז

טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המות מיום היולד: טוב
 ללכת אל-בית-אבל מלכת אל-בית משהה באשר הוא
 סוף כל-האדם וחתו יתן אל-לבו: טוב כעם משחוק
 כרברע פנים יטב לב: לב חכמים בבית אבל ולב

קרי: שחקד.

Chapter seven begins with a play on the alliterative Hebrew words *shem* and *shemen* (name and oil), in the sense that a good name smells sweeter than precious perfume. A good name remains even after death. A man's life cannot be judged happy till its end is reached; hence the day of death is better than

sore affliction. Should a man have a hundred children and live many years, no matter to what great age, still if he has not the full benefit of his good fortune, or if he is deprived of burial, a stillborn child is better off than he. Though an untimely birth comes and goes in vain and into darkness, and its name is enveloped in darkness; though it has not seen or known the sun; yet it is better off than such a man, even if he should live a thousand years twice over, but find no happiness; do not all go to the same place [whether they die young or old]?

All a man's toil is for his mouth, but his appetite is never satisfied. What advantage has the wise man over the fool? What benefit has the poor man for all he knows how to behave toward the living? Better is what the eyes can see than what can be imagined. That too is futility and a striving after wind [seeing does not satisfy unattained desires].

Whatever has happened had been determined long ago; it is known, that man cannot argue with One mightier than he is. Lavish talk merely adds to the futility; what advantage does man derive from it? Who knows what is good for man in life during the brief period of his vain existence, which passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen under the sun after he is gone?

VII

Better a good name than good oil; the day of death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for that is the end of all men, and the living should keep that in mind. Grief is better than gaiety, because in sadness the heart may grow cheerful. The heart of wise men turns to the house of mourning, but the heart of fools turns to the house of mirth.

the day of birth. Since affliction is the common lot of all men, it is better to visit the house of mourning than the house of feasting, so that the living should take to heart and consider that both happiness and adversity come from God. Do not go to extremes. Gossip should not be listened to, since one is sure to hear something unpleasant about himself.

בסילים בבית שמחה: טוב לשמע גערת חכם מאיש
שמע שיר בסילים: כי כקול הפירים תחת הפיר כן
שחק הכסיל וגם זה הכל: כי העשק יחולל חכם
ויאבד את לב מתנה: טוב אחרית דבר מראשיתו טוב
אך דרוח מנקה רוח: אלתבהל ברוחך לבנים כי
כעם בחיק בסילים ינוח: אלתאמר מה הנה שהימים
הראשנים היו טובים מאלה כי לא מחכמה שאלת על-
זה: טובה חכמה עם נחלה ויתר לראי השמש: כי
בצל החכמה בצל הכסף ויתרון דעת החכמה תחיה
בעליה: ראה את מעשה האלהים כי מי יוכל לתקן
את אשר עותו: ביום טובה הנה בטוב וביום רעה ראה
גם את זה לעמת זה עשה האלהים על דברת שלא
ימצא האדם אחריו מאומה: אלתהכל ראיתי בימי
הכלי יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו:
אלתהי צדיק הרבה ואלתתחכם ויתר למה תשומם:
אלתתרשע הרבה ואלתהי סבל למה תמות בלא עתה:
טוב אשר תאחז בזה וגם ימנה אלתנה את ידך בירא
אלהים יצא את כלם: החכמה תעז לחכם מעשרה
שליטים אשר היו בעיר: כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר
יעשה טוב ולא יחטא: גם לכל הדברים אשר ידברו
אלתתן לבך אשר לא תשמע את עבדך מקללך: כי
גם פנמים רבות ידע לבך אשר גם את קללת אחרים:
כל זה נסיתי בחכמה אמרתי אחכמה והיא רחוקה
ממי: רחוק מהדעה ועמק ועמק מי ימצאנו: סבותי

קרי: אלה.

It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man, than for a person to hear the praise song of fools. For, like the sound of thorns crackling under cooking pots is the laughter of a fool. This too is futility; oppression makes the wise man foolish, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Better is the end of something than its beginning; better is the patient temperament than the proud temperament. Never be hasty in your temper, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools. Never ask: "Why were the early days better than these?" You would be asking an unwise question. It is good to possess wisdom along with an estate, an advantage to those who see the sun. For wisdom like wealth is a protection; but knowledge does more good: wisdom safeguards the person who has it.

Observe the work of God; who can straighten what he has made bent? Be pleased in the day of prosperity, and in the day of adversity consider that God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may never know what lies ahead.

I have seen everything during my vain existence, the good man perishing for all his goodness and the evil man flourishing for all his wickedness. Be not over-righteous, be not over-wise; why should you become desolate? Be not excessively bad; be not ignorant; why should you die before your time?

The best way is that you grasp one thing, yet you must not let go of the other. He who reveres God fulfills his duty toward all. Wisdom is better protection for the wise than ten wardens within the city. No man on earth is always just, whose good deeds are without some sinful lapse.

Pay no attention to all that people say, lest you hear your own servant cursing you. You know full well that many times you have reviled others.

I have tested all this by means of wisdom; I thought I would be wise, but wisdom is beyond me. Far off is that which exists,

אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לַדָּעַת וְלַתּוֹר וּבִקְשׁ חֲכָמָה וְחֻשְׁבֹּן וְלִדְעַת
 רָשָׁע כָּסֶל וְהַסְכָּלוֹת הוֹלָלוֹת: וּמִצָּא אֲנִי מֵר מַמּוֹת
 אֶת־הָאֵשָׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוּדִים וְתִרְמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים
 יְדִיהָ טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמְלֹט מִמֶּנָּה וְחוּטָא יִלְכֹּד בָּהּ:
 רָאֵה זֶה מִצָּאתִי אִמְרָה קִהְלֹת אַחַת לְאַחַת לִמְצָא
 חֻשְׁבֹּן: אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מִצָּאתִי אָדָם אֶחָד
 מֵאֲלֶף מִצָּאתִי וְאֵשָׁה בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה לֹא מִצָּאתִי: לְבַד־רָאֵה
 זֶה מִצָּאתִי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יִשָּׁר וְתִמְרָה
 בִּקְשׁוֹ הַשְׁכֵּנוֹת רַבִּים:

ח

מִי כְּתֻחָכֶם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבַר חֲכָמָת אָדָם תֹּאִיר פְּלוֹי
 וְעוֹ פְּלוֹי יִשְׁנָא: אֲנִי פֶרֶם־מֶלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר וְעַל דְּבַר־תְּשׁוּבָת
 אֱלֹהִים: אֶל־תִּבְתֵּל מִפְּנֵי תֵלֶךְ אֶל־תִּנְעַמֵּר בְּדָבָר רָע
 כִּי כָל־אֲשֶׁר תִּחְפֹּץ יַעֲשֶׂה: בְּאִשֶּׁר דְּבַר־מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹן וּמִי
 יֹאמַרְלוֹ מִהֲתַנְשֶׁה: שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יָדַע דְּבַר רָע וְעַתָּה
 וּמִשְׁפָּט יָדַע לֵב חָכִים: כִּי לְכָל־חֲפֹץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט
 כִּי־רָעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו: כִּי־אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מִהֲשִׁיחֶנָּה כִּי
 כֹּאֲשֶׁר יִחְיֶה מִי יֵגִיד לוֹ: אֵין אָדָם שְׁלִיט בְּרוּחַ לְכִלּוֹא
 אֶת־דִּרְחוֹ וְאֵין שְׁלֹמֹן בְּיוֹם הַמּוֹת וְאֵין מִשְׁלָחַת
 בְּמִלְחָמָה וְלֹא־יִמְלֹט רָשָׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו: אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי
 וְתָתֵן אֶת־לִבִּי לְכָל־מַעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ עֵת
 אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם לָרַע לוֹ: וּבִכֵּן רָאִיתִי רָשָׁעִים
 קוֹבְרִים וְכֹאֵן וּמִמָּקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ וְהִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר

and deep it lies, very deep; who can find it out? I turned my thoughts toward knowledge, to explore, to search wisdom and the sum of reality, to identify evil as ignorance and stupidity as madness.

I have discovered something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart consists of traps and snares, whose hands are chains. He whom God favors escapes her, but the sinner is caught by her.

Behold, this is what I have found, says *Koheleth*. Adding one thing to another, to find the sum total which my mind had sought repeatedly without success, I have found one man in a thousand, but have not found one woman in all these. Here is all I have been able to discover, namely: God has made man upright, but they have contrived many hidden subtleties.

VIII

Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of a thing? A man's wisdom illumines his face, and the harshness of his countenance is transformed. I say: keep the king's command, and that in view of the oath in the name of God. Do not hasten to leave his presence; do not persist in an evil matter, for he can do as he pleases. A king's word is law; who dare say to him: "What are you doing?" He who obeys his command will experience no harm; a wise mind will know the proper time. Everything has its own time and method; human misery is great indeed. Man does not know what will happen, and who can tell him how it will happen? No man can control the wind, to hold the wind in check; nor has he the power over the day of death; there is no furlough in war, and evil cannot save the wrongdoer.

All this I have observed, keeping in mind what is being done under the sun, when one man tyrannizes over another man to do him harm. Then I saw the wicked being buried at a ripe age, while those who had done right departed from the holy place and were forgotten in the city. This too is absurd. Because the sen-

בְּרָעָשׁוֹ נִסְחָה הַבֵּל: אֲשֶׁר אֵין נַעֲשֶׂה פִתְנוֹם מַעֲשֵׂה
הַרְעָה מִהֲרָה עַל־פִּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּגִיד־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת
רָע: אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עֲשֵׂה רָע מֵאֵת וּמֵאַרְךָ לֹא בִי נִסְיוֹנָע
אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר תְּהִדְטוֹב לִירְאִי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִירָאוּ מִלִּפְנֵי:
וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְרָשָׁע וְלֹא־יֵאָרֶךְ יָמִים בְּצֹל אֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ
יֵרָא מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים: יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר וַיֵּשׂ צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מֵנִיעַ אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים
וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁעִים שֶׁמֵּנִיעַ אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים אֲמַרְתִּי
שֶׁנִּסְחָה הַבֵּל: וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשִּׁמְחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין
טוֹב לָאָדָם תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֵאכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמֹחַ
וְהוּא יִלְנֶנּוּ בַעֲמָלוֹ יָמֵי חַיָּו אֲשֶׁר־נִתְּןָ לָו הָאֱלֹהִים תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: כֹּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לָדַעַת חֲכָמָה וְלִדְאוֹת
אֶת־הַעֲנָנִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ כִּי גַם בְּיוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה
שׁוֹהָ בַעֲיֵנָיו אֵינֶנּוּ רֹאֶה: וְרֵאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
כִּי לֹא יוֹכֵל הָאָדָם לִמְצוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה
תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּשׁוֹל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמַל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמָּצֵא
וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר הַחֲכָם לָדַעַת לֹא יוֹכֵל לִמְצֹא:

ט

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל־לִבִּי וְלִבּוֹר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה אֲשֶׁר
הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים יַעֲבִדוּהֶם בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים נִסְאִי־הֶבֶה
נִסְשִׁנָּה אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לַפְּנִיָּה: הַכֹּל כֹּאֲשֶׁר
לְכָל מִקְרָה אַחֵר לַצַּדִּיק וְלְרָשָׁע לְטוֹב וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא
וְלַזָּכֵחַ וְלַאֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ זָכֵחַ כְּטוֹב כְּחָטָא הַנִּשְׁבָּע כֹּאֲשֶׁר

tence for wrongdoing is not promptly executed, men's heart is filled with the desire to do evil.

Though a sinner commits evil a hundred times, God is patient with him.

But I am certain that those who revere God, and fear him, will fare well; the bad man will not fare well and will not survive long, like a shadow, since he does not revere God.

It is absurd what is being done on earth: good men fare as the wicked should fare, and wicked men fare as though they were good. I declare that this makes no sense.

So I commend enjoyment, because there is nothing good for man under the sun but to eat and drink and be happy. This will accompany him in his toiling during the life God grants him under the sun.

When I applied my mind to acquire wisdom and to observe the activity which takes place on earth, for man sleeps neither by day nor by night, I saw all the work of God that is done under the sun. However much man toils in searching, he cannot discover the meaning of it; and though the wise man may think he is about to know it, he cannot discover it all.

IX

All this I have kept in mind, clearly observing it all, how the just and the wise and their works are in God's power. Man cannot know about God's love or hatred. Anything may be in store for anyone. All things come alike to all; the same chance befalls the innocent and the guilty; to the good and pure and to the unclean, to him who brings an offering and to him who does not. As it is with the good man, so it is with the sinner; as with the one who swears, so with him who fears an oath.

שבוּעָה יֵרָא: וְהוֹרַע בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
 כִּי־מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְכָל יוֹם לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם מִלֹּא־רָע וְהוֹלָלוֹת
 בְּלִבָּבָם בַּחַיִּים וְאַחֲרָיו אֱלֹהִימוֹת: כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר
 אֵל כְּלִיהֲתָיִים יֵשׁ בַּמָּחֹץ כִּי־לִבָּב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן
 הָאֲרֶזֶה הַמֵּת: כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שְׂיָמְתוּ וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם
 יוֹדְעִים מָאוּמָה וְאִידֶּעַד לָהֶם שָׁכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח זִכְרָם:
 גַּם אֶהְבֶּתֶם גַּם־שִׁנְאֶתֶם גַּם־קִנְאֶתֶם בְּכָר אֲבֹדָה וְחֶלֶק
 אִידֶּלְהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:
 לֵךְ אֲכַל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחֲמֹךְ וְשִׂתָּה בְּלִב־טוֹב יִינֹךְ כִּי בְכָר
 רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֶׂךָ: בְּכֻל־עֵת יִהְיוּ בְּנִדְוָךְ לִבְנִים
 וְשִׁמְן עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ אֶל־יַחְסֹר: רֹאה חַיִּים עִם־אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר
 אֲהַבְתָּ כִּי־לִמִּי חַי הַבֶּלֶד אֲשֶׁר נִתַּךְ לֵךְ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כֹּל
 יְמֵי הַבֶּלֶד כִּי הוּא חֹלֶקֶד בַּחַיִּים וּבְעַמְלֹךְ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עֹמֵל
 תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכֹחֶךָ עֲשֵׂה
 כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֶׂה וְחִשְׁבוֹן וְתַעַת וְחִבְמָה בְּשִׁאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה
 דֹּלֵךְ שָׁמָּה: שְׁבִתִּי וְרֹאה תַּהֲתִי־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא לִקְלִים
 הַמְרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים הַמְלַחֲמָה וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לַחֵם
 וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבוֹנִים עֹשֶׁר וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן כִּי־עַתָּה נִפְגַּע
 יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּלֶם: כִּי גַם לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֲתוֹ בַּדְּגִים
 שְׁנֵאֲחֻזֵּם בַּמַּצּוֹדָה רָעָה וּכְצַפְרִים הָאֲחֻזּוֹת בַּפֶּח כְּהֵם
 וְזֻקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לַעַת רָעָה כִּשְׁתַּפּוּל עֲלֵיהֶם פְּתָאִם:
 גַּם־נָה רָאִיתִי חֲכָמָה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְגִדּוּלָה הִיא אֵלָּי:
 עֵיר קַמְנָה וְאַנְשֵׁים כְּהָ מַעֵט וּבֹא־אֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְסַבֵּב
 אֶתָּה וּבְנָה עֲלֶיהָ מְצוּדִים גָּדוֹלִים: וּמַצָּא כְּהָ אִישׁ מִסְבֵּן

כִּי: וְחֶסֶד הָאֲרֶזֶה

This is the worst of all the things that happen under the sun, that one fate turns out the same for all. That is why the minds of men are filled with evil, and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and then they join the dead.

There is hope for anyone who is joined to the living; a live dog is better off than a dead lion.

The living know that they are to die, but the dead no longer know anything. They no longer have any compensation, for all memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate, their envy have long since perished. They will never again have part in anything that is done under the sun.

Go, then, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, since God has already approved your deeds. At all times let your clothing be white; spare not perfume on your head. Enjoy life with the woman you love, through all the fleeting days of your life, which God has granted you under the sun; for that is your share while you live and toil under the sun.

Whatever you are able to do, do with your full strength; for there is no doing or reckoning or knowing or understanding in the grave toward which you are going.

Once more I saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong; nor is bread won by the wise, nor wealth by the intelligent, nor favor by the learned; indeed, a time of calamity overtakes them all.

Man never knows when his time will come; like fish caught in a fatal net, like birds seized in a snare, so are men caught when the time of disaster comes suddenly upon them.

This also I have observed as an example of wisdom under the sun, and it seems significant to me: there was a small city with few people in it, and a great king attacked it, surrounding it and building great siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a

חכם ומלמד הוא את העיר בחכמתו ואדם לא זכר את-
האיש המסכן ההוא: ואמרתי אני טובה חכמה מנבונה
וחכמת המסכן בזויה ודבריו אינם נשמעים: דברי
חכמים בנחת נשמעים מועקת מושל בכסילים: טובה
חכמה מבלי קרב וחוטא אחד יאבד טובה הרבה:

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ובימי מות ובאיש יביע שמן רוקח יקר מחכמה מכבוד
סבלות מעט: לב חכם לימינו ולב כסיל לשמאלו: וגם-
בדרך כשתסבל הדרך לבו חסר ואמר לכל סבל הוא:
אסדרות המושל תעלה עליך מקומה אליהנה כי מרפא
ניח חטאים גדולים: יש רעה ראיתי תחת השמש
כשנגה שיצא מלפני השליט: נתן הסבל במרומים
רבנים ועשירים בשפל ישבו: ראיתי עבדים על-סוסים
ושרים הלכים בעבדים על-הארץ: חפר נחמץ בו יפול
ופרץ נדר ישבע נחש: מסיני אבנים יעצב בהם בוקע
עצים יסכן בס: אסדקהה הכחול והוא לא-פנים קלמל
וחילים וגבר ויתרון הכשיר חכמה: אסדשך הנחש
בלוא-לחש ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון: דברי פרחים חן
ושפתות כסיל תבלענו: תחלת דברי-פיהו סבלות ואחרית
פיהו הזללות רעה: והסבל ירבה דברים לא-ידע האדם
מה-שיהיה ואשר יהיה מאחריו מי יגיד לו: עמל
הכסילים תנעט אשר לא-ידע ללכת אל-עיר: אי-לך
ארץ שמלכך נער ושררך בבקר יאכלו: אשרך ארץ

קרי: קססכל

poor wise man, and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man! I have said that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words go unheeded.

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but a single error can destroy much that is good.

X

Dead flies make the perfumer's oil foul; a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. A wise man's heart turns him to his right; a fool's heart turns him to his left. Even when the fool walks through the street, he lacks sense, and says to everyone that he is a fool.

If the anger of the ruler flares up against you, do not resign your post; gentleness will make amends for great offenses.

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in many high places, while the noble sit in lowly places. I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes plodding on foot like slaves.

He who digs a pit may fall into it; he who breaks down a wall may be bitten by a serpent. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them; he who splits logs is endangered by them.

If the axe is blunt, and one does not whet the edge, one must put more strength into the blow; wisdom helps one to succeed.

If the serpent bites because it has not been charmed, then the charmer's skill is without advantage.

The words of a wise man's mouth win favor, but the fool's lips destroy him. The beginning of his words is foolishness, and the end of his mouthing is evil madness. The fool prates on and on, though no man knows what it is all about; and who can tell him what will be after him?

The toil of a fool wearies him, so that he does not know the way to the city.

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a mere boy, and your princes feast in the morning! Happy are you, O land, when your

מִלְכֵּי הַיָּם:

५८. : इंद्रिन्द्र

[illegible]

五

科學

[illegible]

king is the son of free men, and your princes feast at the proper time, in might, and not in drinking bouts.

Through laziness the roof sinks in; when the hands are slack the house leaks.

Bread is made for laughter, wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

Even in your thought do not curse the king; in the privacy of your bedroom do not revile the rich; because the birds of the air may carry your voice, some winged creature may reveal what you say.

XI

Cast your bread upon the waters; after a long time you may find it again.

Contribute portions to seven, even to eight, for you know not what evil may happen upon the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; when a tree falls, to south or north, where the tree falls, there it will lie. He who observes the wind will not sow; he who regards the clouds will not reap.

As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones of the child in the mother's womb, so you cannot know how God makes everything else.

Sow your seed in the morning [of life] and stay not your hand in the evening; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will have success.

Sweet is the light [of life], and pleasant it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

If a man lives many years, let him have joy throughout them all; let him remember that the dark days will be many. All that comes [after death] is emptiness.

Rejoice in your youth, young man; let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; follow your heart's desire and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you to account.

Banish grief from your heart, and remove pain from your body, for youth and the dawn [of life] are fleeting vapor.

יב

וזכר את-בוראך בימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא-יבא ימי
 הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אידלי בהם חפץ: עד
 אשר לא-תחשך השמש והאור והירח והכוכבים ושבו
 העבים אחר-הגשם: ביום שיועז שמרי הבית והתענותו
 אנשי החיל ובטלו המחנות כי מיטו וחשכו הראות
 בארבות: וסגרו דלתים בשוק בשפל קול המחנה ויקום
 לקול הצפור וישחו כל-בנות השיר: גם מגבה ייראו
 וחתחתים בדרך וינאץ השקר ויסתכל החגב ותפר
 האביונה כירחך האדם אל-בית עלמו וסבכו בשוק
 הסופרים: עד אשר לא-ירחק תכל הכסף ותרוץ גלת
 הזהב ותשבר כל על-המכוע וגרץ הנגלגל אל-הבור:
 וישב העפר על-הארץ כשהנה והרוח תשוב אל-האלהים
 אשר נתנה: הכל הכלים אמר הקהלת הכל הכל:
 ויתר שהנה קהלת חכם עוד למד-דעת את-העם ואין
 וחקר תקן משלים הרבה: בקש קהלת למצא דברי-
 חפץ ובתיב ישר דברי אמת: דברי חכמים בדרך-בנות
 ובמשמרות נטושים בעלי אספות נתנו מרעה אחד: ויתר

The last verse of chapter seven refers to the faculties with which God
 endowed us for the perpetuation of mankind. However, our faculties are
 often corrupted and used for inferior purposes. According to the talmudic
 sages, our evil impulse (יצר הרע) was created for a positive purpose, for were
 it not for that impulse, a man would not build a house, marry a wife, beget
 children, or conduct business transactions. קרי: ירמס.

XII

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years approach of which you will say: "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun grows dark, and the light of the moon and the stars; and the clouds return after the rain; in the day when the house guards tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders fail because they are few; and those that look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors to the street are shut; when the sound of the mill runs low, and one rises at the chirp of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; when one is afraid of what is high, and terrors are in the street; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper grows sluggish, and desire fails. Because man goes to his eternal home, and mourners pass along the street; before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel is broken at the cistern; when the dust returns to earth once more, and the spirit to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says Kohleth, all is vanity!

The wiser Kohleth became, the more he taught the people knowledge; he weighed and examined and arranged many proverbs. Kohleth sought to find pleasing words, and to write down words of truth with precision.

The words of the wise are like goads; like nails driven home are the collected sayings given by one shepherd. My son, beware

A noted writer discovered in the last verse of chapter seven an incentive to better living: "You have had false prophets among you, who have told you that all men are nothing but fiends and wolves—half beast, half devil. Believe that, and indeed you may sink to that. But refuse that, and have faith that God made you upright."

חכמת אדם האיר פניו (8:1) a person's wisdom is reflected in the serene and happy look on his face. ישנו פניו ווען פניו his fierce countenance is changed, that is a cultured person lends an attractive expression to his face, removing from it the forbidding look which repels.

מִהֶמָּה בְּנֵי הַזֶּהָר עֲשׂוֹת סִפְרִים הִרְבֵּה אֵין קִין וְלֵהֲנֵג
 הִרְבֵּה יָנַעַת בְּשֹׁר: סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים
 יִרְא וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר כִּירוֹה כְּל־הָאָדָם: בִּי אֶת־כָּל־
 מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בְּמִשְׁפָּט עַל כָּל־נַעֲלָם אִם־טוֹב
 וְאִם־רָע:

סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְא
 וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר כִּירוֹה כְּל־הָאָדָם:

י

אין שלח (8:8) has two midrashic interpretations, according to which the meaning is: a man cannot say, when summoned to die, "let my son, or my servant, or anyone else in my household, die instead of me." Or, a man cannot forge a weapon (שלח) to defend himself in his struggle against death. In the battle with death no release may be had. According to Deuteronomy 20:5-9, able-bodied men from twenty years of age, who were liable to military service, were exempted under certain conditions. The fainthearted, for example, were discharged, since fear is infectious, and the presence of such persons in the army would be a source of weakness and danger in the case of war.

לא ימלס רשע את בעלז has been taken to mean that no wicked schemes can save anyone whose time has come to die.

of anything beyond these. There is no end to the making of many books; much study is a weariness of the flesh.

In conclusion, summing it all up: Revere God, and keep his commands; for this is all there is to man. God will bring every deed to account, concerning every secret matter, whether it is good or evil.

In conclusion, summing it all up: Revere God, and keep his commands; for this is all there is to man.

The first seven verses of chapter twelve have been interpreted as a description of the gradual failing of the human body, one organ after another, till death arrives: The light grows dim to the aged eyes, and reason is dulled. The limbs tremble; the arms become bent and feeble; the few teeth that are left no longer do the work of mastication. The means of communication with the outer world are shut; the voice is low and feeble; the slightest sound breaks in upon rest; music no longer gives pleasure. Sleeplessness becomes the old man's lot; the lightest weight is a burden. The golden bowl of the lamp of life is broken, and the silver cord, by which it is suspended, loosed; and the pitcher, which has often gone to draw at the fountain of life, is shattered, and so is the wheel. These are said to refer to the action of the lungs and of the heart.

סוף דבר, the final summary of the book *Koheleth* is as follows: Revere God and keep his commandments, since this is the whole of man. This verse is repeated at the end of the public reading of the book of *Koheleth* in order not to conclude with the ominous word רע (evil). The same traditional rule applies to other occasions.

מִגִּלַּת אֶסְתֵּר

א

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ הוּא אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִדָּוִד וְעַד־
כּוֹשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה: בַּיּוֹם הָהֵם בָּשְׁבַת
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה:
בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו
חֵיל אֶפְרָם וּמְדֵי הַפְּרָתִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת לִפְנָיו:
בְּהֵרָאֵתוֹ אֶת־עֶשֶׂר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יֶקֶךְ תַּפְאֲרָתוֹ
נְדִילָתוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים שְׂמוֹנִים וּמֵאָת יוֹם: וּבְמִלּוֹאת הַיּוֹם
הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הָעָם הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה
לְמַגְדּוֹל וְעַד־קָטָן מִשְׁתֵּה שְׁבַעַת יָמִים בַּחֲצָר גִּנַּת בֵּיתֵן
הַמֶּלֶךְ: חֹר וּכְרָפֶם וּתְכֵלֶת אַחוּז בַּחֲבִל־בוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן
עַל־גִּלְדֵי כֶסֶף וְעִמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מִטּוֹת וְהָב וְכֶסֶף עַל רֹצֵפֶת
בְּהַטְוֵשׁ וְדָר וּסְחָרָת: וְהַשְׁקוֹת בְּכֵלֵי זָהָב וּבָלִים

The events recounted in the book of Esther relate to the period when considerable numbers of Jews were scattered over the Persian Empire, even though many of them had returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel with the assent of Cyrus in the year 538 before the common era.

ESTHER

I

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia, over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. In those days, when king Ahasuerus occupied his royal throne in Shushan the capital, during the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officers and servants. The nobles of the Persian-Median army and the governors of the provinces were present, when he displayed the wealth of his royal splendor and his glorious greatness for many days, a hundred and eighty days in all.

When these days were over, the king gave a banquet for all the people present in Shushan the capital, high and low, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the royal palace. There were hangings of white, violet and blue cotton, corded with fine purple linen, caught up on silver rings and marble columns; the couches of gold and silver were set on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and costly stones. The drinks were served in golden cups of various patterns; the royal

One of the most cherished books in Jewish literature, Esther tells the story of a girl by the name of Hadassah who used her influence as queen of Persia to save her people from a general massacre which Haman had plotted against them on purely racial grounds. It is a tale of plot and counterplot, showing

מבלי שונים וזין מלכות רב ביד המלך: והשתנה
 כדת אין אנם כירבן ויסד המלך על כל-רב ביתו
 לעשות כרצון איש-ואיש: גם ושת המלכה עשתה
 משתה נשים בית המלכות אשר למלך אחשוורוש: ביום
 השביעי כטוב לבי-המלך בגן אמר למהומן בזהא
 חרבוניא בנתא ואבנתא ותר וכרפס שבעת הסריסים
 המשרתים את-פני המלך אחשוורוש: להביא את-
 ושת המלכה לפני המלך בכתר מלכות להראות העמים
 והשרים את-יפדה כר-טובת מראה היא: ותמאן המלכה
 ושת לבוא בדבר המלך אשר ביד הסריסים ויקצף
 המלך מאד ותמתו בערה בו: ויאמר המלך
 לחכמים ודעי העתים כי-כן דבר המלך לפני כל-ידעי
 דת ודון: והקרב אליו פרשנא שתר אדמתא תרשיש
 מרם מרסנא ממוכן שבעת שרי ופרס ומדי ראי פני
 המלך הנשכים ראשנה במלכות: כדת מה-לעשות
 במלכה ושת על אשר לא-עשתה את-מאמר המלך
 אחשוורוש ביד הסריסים: ויאמר מומכן לפני המלך
 והשרים לא על-המלך לבדו עושה ושת המלכה כי
 על-כל-השרים ועל-כל-העמים אשר בכל-מדינות
 המלך אחשוורוש: כריצא דבר-המלכה על-כל-הנשים
 להבנות בעליהן בעיניהן באמר המלך אחשוורוש אמר
 להביא את-נשתי המלכה לפני ולא-באה: והיום הנה

קרי: קמיון.

the downfall of the arrogant and the vindication of the innocent. Haman's fate reminds us that pride goes before a fall. Ahasuerus, who agrees to Haman's plot without thought, is portrayed as a pompous and feeble-minded monarch. He is identified by some Bible scholars with Xerxes, who reigned from 486

wine was in plenty according to the bounty of the king. The drinking was regulated, so that there was no one compelling to drink, for the king had given orders to all the stewards of his palace to respect the wishes of each man. Queen Vashti, too, held a banquet for the women in the royal palace of king Ahasuerus.

On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harvona, Bigtha, Avagtha, Zethar and Karkas, the seven eunuchs who attended King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before him wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and the officers, for she was indeed a beautiful woman. But Queen Vashti refused to come in answer to the king's order, brought by the eunuchs. The king was thereupon greatly incensed, his anger blazed up.

Then the king consulted the wise men versed in precedents, for it was the royal way of discussing any action with those who were expert in law and justice. Closest to him were Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memukhan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king and held first place in the empire. He asked: "What ought to be done to Queen Vashti for refusing to obey the command of King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?"

Memukhan replied in presence of the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has done wrong not to the king alone, but also to all the officers and to all the peoples in all the lands of King Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen will be made known to all the women, causing them to look down upon their husbands, saying: King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come. This very day, the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will be telling

to 465 B.C.E. Others believe him to be Artaxerxes II, who reigned from 404 to 361, and who is mentioned in Ezra 4:6.

Though the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, the author clearly implies that God used Mordecai and Esther as instruments for the deliverance of a persecuted people. Piety in its usual sense receives little emphasis in this book. God is not mentioned even when the sense demands, as when Mordecai suggests that deliverance may arise from another quarter (4:14). Prayer does not accompany fasting during Esther's preparation for pleading with the king.

תאמרנה ושרות פרסיומדי אשר שמעו את דבר המלכה
 לכל שרי המלך וכרי בנזן וקצף: אם יעלה המלך טוב
 תצא דבר מלכות מלפניו ויכתב בדת פרסיומדי ולא
 יעבור אשר לא תבא ושתי לפני המלך אהשוורוש
 ומלכותה יתן המלך לרעותה הטובה ממנה: ונשמע
 פתגם המלך אשר יעשה בכל מלכותו כי רבה היא
 וכל הנשים יתנו יקר לבעליהן למגדול ועד קטן: ויטב
 הדבר בעיני המלך והשרים ויעש המלך בדבר ממוכן:
 וישלח ספרים אל כל מדינות המלך אל מדינה ומדינה
 בכתב ואלעם ועם כלשוננו להודות כל איש שרר
 בביתו ומדבר כלשון עמו:

ב

אחר הדברים האלה כשך חמת המלך אהשוורוש ובר
 את ושתי ואת אשר עשתה ואת אשר נגזר עליה:
 ויאמרו נערי המלך משרתיו ובקשו למלך נערות בתולות
 טובות מראה: ויפקד המלך פקידים בכל מדינות
 מלכותו ויקבצו את כל נערה בתולה טובת מראה אל
 שושן הבירה אל בית הנשים אליו הנא סרים המלך
 שמר הנשים ונתון תמקנתן: והנערה אשר תיטב
 בעיני המלך תמלך תחת ושתי ויטב הדבר בעיני
 המלך ויעש כן: איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה
 ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בדשמי בדקיש איש ימיני: אשר
 הגלה מירושלים עם הגולה אשר הגלתה עם יכניה

The book of Esther has become a symbol of heroic resistance against persecution followed by deliverance. The downfall of Haman, brought about by his futile attempt to exterminate the Jewish people, is a triumphant re-

it to all the officers of the king, and there will be plenty of disrespect and wrath. If it please the king, let a royal edict go forth from him and let it be inscribed in the laws of the Persians and Medes, never to be revoked, that Vashti shall not again appear before King Ahasuerus, and let the king assign her royal position to another who is better than she. So, when the king's decree is proclaimed throughout his realm, vast as it is, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low."

This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memukhan proposed. He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, directing that every man should be master in his own house and speak the language of his own people.

II

After these events, when the anger of King Ahasuerus calmed down, he recalled what Vashti had done and what had been decreed against her. So the king's attendants said: "Let beautiful girls be sought out for the king; let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his realm to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the women's quarters in Shushan the capital city, to be placed under the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women; let them be provided with the cosmetics they require. Let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This idea pleased the king and he acted on it

Now there was a Jew in Shushan the capital city whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried off from Jerusalem along with the exiles who had been deported with Jekhoniah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar

minder of the continuing life of the Jewish people in the face of all persecution. It has been suggested that the omission of reference to God in the book of Esther is easily understood in a story designed to be recited at a festival of conviviality, merrymaking, and noise, such as Purim. The noise-making instruments, used to blot out the name of Haman, are reminiscent of Deut-

מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגִּילָה נְכוּבְדַּנְצֵר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל: וַיְהִי אַמֵּן
 אֶת־הַדְּרָפָה הַיָּא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דָּדִיז בִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְאִם
 וַתִּנְעֲרָה יַפְתִּיתָאֵר וְטוֹכֶת מֶרְאָה וּבְמוֹת אֲבִיהָ וְאַמָּה
 לִקְחָהּ מֶרְדֵּכִי לֹא לְבַת: וַיְהִי בַּהֲשָׁמַע דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַדְּתוּ
 וּבַהֲקִבֵּץ נַעֲרוֹת רְבוֹת אֶל־שׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּיירָה אֶל־יָד הַגִּי
 וַתִּלְקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יָד הַגִּי שְׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים:
 וַתִּטֵּב הַנְּעָרָה בְּעֵינֶיז וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לִפְנֵיז וַיְבַהֵל אֶת־
 תַּמְרוּקִיָּה וְאֶת־מְנוּחֵיהָ לְתֵת לָהּ וְאֵת שִׁבְעַת הַנְּעָרוֹת
 הָרֵאיוֹת לְתֵת־לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנָה וְאֶת־נַעֲרוֹתֶיהָ
 לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים: לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עָמָהּ וְאֶת־
 מוֹלַדְתָּהּ בִּי מֶרְדֵּכִי צוּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגִּיד: וּבְכָל־
 יוֹם וַיּוֹם מֶרְדֵּכִי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֲצַר בֵּית־הַנָּשִׁים לְדַעַת
 אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמַה־עָשָׂה בָּהּ: וּבַהֲנִיעַ תֵּרַ נַעֲרָה
 וְנַעֲרָה לְבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוּשׁ מִקֵּץ הַיּוֹת לָהּ כְּדַת
 הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בִּי כֵּן יִמְלֹאוּ יְמֵי מְרוּקִיהֶן שְׁשָׁה
 חֳדָשִׁים בְּשֶׁמֶן הַמֵּר וְשִׁשָּׁה חֳדָשִׁים בְּבִשְׁמִים וּבַת־מְרוּקִי
 הַנָּשִׁים: וּכְזֹה הַנְּעָרָה בָּאָה אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
 תֹּאמַר יִתֵּן לָהּ לְבוֹא עָמָה מִבֵּית הַנָּשִׁים עַד־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ:
 בְּעֶרֶב הָיָא בָּאָה וּבְבֹקֶר הָיָא שָׁבָה אֶל־בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים
 שְׁנֵי אֶל־יָד שְׁעָשְׁנוּ סָרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁמֵר הַפִּילִגְשִׁים לֹא
 תָּבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּי אִם־חֶפֶץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרָאָה
 בְּשֵׁם: וּבַהֲנִיעַ תֵּרַ אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־אֲבִיתָיָא יָד מֶרְדֵּכִי אֲשֶׁר

economy 25:19 concerning the merciless Amalekites: "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." Some were accustomed to have Haman's name written on the soles of their shoes, so that it was worn away through stamping their feet whenever it was mentioned during the reading of *Megillath Esther*.

king of Babylon had carried away. He had a foster-child Hadassa, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The girl was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

When the king's bidding and edict were proclaimed, and when many girls were being brought to the capital of Shushan and placed in charge of Hegai, Esther was taken into the royal house to be entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the women. The girl pleased him; she became a favorite of his; he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her allowance of food, and also with seven picked maids from the king's palace; he gave her and her maids privileges in the women's quarters.

Esther had not said anything about her people or her descent, for Mordecai had told her to say nothing about it. Every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the women's quarters to learn how Esther was fairing and what was happening to her.

Now, when the turn came for every girl to go to King Ahasuerus, after she had spent twelve months' treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she came back to the second harem in charge of Shashgaz, the king's eunuch, who had charge of the concubines. She did not go in to the king again, unless the king desired her and she was summoned by name.

When the turn came for Esther, daughter of Avihail the uncle

In many regards the story of Esther is typical of the Jewish experience in the Diaspora. By the association of its events with the fate of the Jewish people, the narrative has invited amplifications readily supplied by popular fancy. According to *Pirké d'Rabbi Eliezer* of the eighth century, Mordecai was named *Yehudi* (Jew) because he was engaged in Torah study all his life, and was not defiled by any forbidden food. He heard the two eunuchs of the

of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his daughter, to go to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch advised, being in charge of the women. Esther was liked by all who saw her. When Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal house, in the seventh year of his reign, in the tenth month, that is the month of Teveth, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the girls; he placed the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. The king then gave a great banquet to all his officers and courtiers, a banquet in honor of Esther. He granted remission of taxes to the provinces and distributed gifts worthy of a king.

During a second levy of girls, Mordecai sat at the king's gate. Now Esther had not yet said anything about her descent or her people, on the instructions of Mordecai; she still did what Mordecai told her, just as when she was his ward. It was in those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, that Bigthan and Teresh, two of the royal eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. The plot became known to Mordecai, who disclosed it to Queen Esther. Esther told the king, in Mordecai's name. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. The story was recorded in the annals in the presence of the king.

III

It was after this that King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, setting his seat above all the princes who were with him. All the royal courtiers within the king's gate bowed low and prostrated themselves before Haman, for the king had so ordered concerning him. But

name of Mordecai. Hence, the sages have said: Whoever tells something in the name of its original author brings redemption into the world . . . Haman was an astrologer; he cast lots by the constellations to know the distinction between one day and another . . . (chapters 49-50).

לֹא יָבִרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמַרְדֵּכָי מְדוּעַ אַתָּה עוֹבֵר אֶת מִצְוַת
הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיְהִי בְּאָמְרָם אֵלָיו יוֹם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם
וַיָּגִדוּ לְהֶמֶן לִרְאוֹת הַעֲמָדוֹ דְּבַרֵי מַרְדֵּכָי כִּי־הִגִּיד לְקֹב
אֲשֶׁר־הוּא יְהוּדִי: וַיֵּרָא הֶמֶן כִּי־אֵין מַרְדֵּכָי כֹרַע
וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ וַיִּמְלֹא הֶמֶן חֲמָה: וַיָּבֹו בְּעֵינָיו לִשְׁלַח דָּל
בְּמַרְדֵּכָי לְבָדּוֹ כִּי־הִגִּידוּ לוֹ אֶת־עַם מַרְדֵּכָי וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הֶמֶן
לְהִשְׁמִיד אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹת אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ
עִם מַרְדֵּכָי: בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ נִסָּן בִּשְׁמַת
שְׁתִּים עֶשְׂרֵה לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ הַפִּיל פּוֹר הוּא הַגּוֹדֵל
לִפְנֵי הֶמֶן מִיּוֹם ׀ לַיּוֹם וּמִחֹדֶשׁ לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר הוּא־
חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר: וַיֹּאמֶר הֶמֶן לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ יִשְׁנֹו
עַם־אֶחָד מִפּוֹר וּמִפָּרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹות מְלְכוּתְךָ
וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכְּלָעַם וְאֶת־דַּתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עוֹשִׂים
וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין שׁוּה לְהַנִּיחָם: אִם־עַל־יְהִי מֶלֶךְ טוֹב יִקְתָּב
לְאַבְדָּם וְעִשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים כְּבַר־כֶּסֶף אֲשַׁקּוֹל עַל־יְדֵי עֲשִׂי
הַמֶּלֶאכָה לְהָבִיא אֶל־גִּנּוֹן הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיִּסֶּר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ
מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֶּנָּה לְהֶמֶן כִּי־הִמְרִתָּא הָאֵנָּי צָרָר הַיְּהוּדִים:
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהֶמֶן הַכֶּסֶף נָתַן לָךְ וְהָעָם לַעֲשׂוֹת בּוֹ
כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ: וַיִּקְרְאוּ סְפָרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן
בְּשָׁלוּשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ וַיִּקְתָּב בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה הֶמֶן אֶל
אַחַשְׁוֵרְפָּנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶל־הַפָּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר ׀ עַל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה

קרי: בְּאָמְרָם.

Originally named Hadassah (myrtle), the chief character who has given her name to the book of Esther derived her adopted title from the Persian *stara* (star), according to some Bible authorities. The story of Esther is, in many regards, typical of the story of the Jewish people. It is recalled even

Mordecai did not bow low, he did not prostrate himself. So the royal courtiers who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai: "Why are you disobeying the king's order?" Day after day they said this to him, but he would not listen to them. So they informed Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman noticed that Mordecai did not bow low to him and did not prostrate himself, he was enraged. He thought it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone. They had told him who Mordecai's people were, and so Haman planned to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the entire empire of Ahasuerus.

In the first month, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast lots, called *Pur*, in the presence of Haman, for day after day and month after month, [till it fell upon the thirteenth day of] the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus: "There is a certain people, dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm; their laws are different from those of every other people; they do not obey the king's laws; therefore it does not befit the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let an edict be written for their destruction; and I will pay ten thousands of silver talents into the hands of those in charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the royal treasury." So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Then the king said to Haman: "Keep your money, and do with the people what like."

On the thirteenth day of the first month the king's secretaries were summoned, and a despatch was drawn up, in accordance with Haman's instructions, for the royal satraps, for the governors of every province, and for the officials of each separate people,

more vividly by their daily experience than by the annual reading of the *Megillah*. The story of Esther's life is elaborated by various midrashim, in the following terms:

A foundling or an orphan, her father dying before her birth, her mother at her birth, Esther was reared in the house of Mordecai, her cousin. Her original name, Hadassah, was changed to Esther by the star-worshippers, as

וְאֶל־שָׂרֵי עַם וְעַם מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כְּכַתְּבָהּ וְעַם וְעַם
 בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרִשׁ נִכְתָּב וְנִחַתָּם בְּמִטְבַּעַת
 הַמֶּלֶךְ; וְנִשְׁלָחוּ סִפְרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינֹת
 הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהָרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת־כָּל־יְהוּדִים מִנֶּעַר
 וְעַד־זָקֵן טָף וְנָשִׁים בְּיוֹם אֶחָד בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ
 שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וּשְׁלָלָם לְבוֹז; פִּתְשָׁנוּ הַכְּתָב
 לְהַנָּתֵן דָּת בְּכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה גָלוּי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים לְהַזִּית
 עֲתִידִים לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: הָרָצִים יֵצְאוּ דְחוּפִים בְּדִבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וְהָיָה נִתְּנָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּירָה וְהַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמֶן יֵשְׁבוּ לִשְׁתוֹת
 וְהָעִיר שׁוֹשָׁן נְבֻכָה:

ד

וּמֶרְדֳּכָי יָדַע אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה וַיִּקְרַע מְרֹדֶכִי אֶת־
 בְּגָדָיו וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שָׂק וַאֲפֹר יֵצֵא בַּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וַיִּזְעַק וַעֲקָה
 גְּדֻלָּהּ וּמָרָה: יָבֹא עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אֵין לָבֹא
 אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלִבּוֹשׁ שָׂק: וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מְקוֹם
 אֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מִגִּיעַ אֲכָל גְּדוֹל לַיהוּדִים וְצוּם
 וּבְכִי וּמִסְפָּד שָׂק וַאֲפֹר יָצַע לָרַבִּים: וְתָבוֹאִינָה נַעֲרוֹת
 אֶסְתֵּר וּסְרִיסָיָהּ וַיִּגִּדּוּ לָהּ וּתְתַחַלְחַל הַמַּלְכָּה מְאֹד
 וְתִשְׁלַח בְּגָדִים לְהַלְבִּישׁ אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי וּלְהַסִּיר שָׂקוֹ מֵעָלָיו
 וְלֹא קִבַּל: וְתִקְרָא אֶסְתֵּר לְהִתֵּן מִסְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
 הָעַמִּיד לִפְנֶיהָ וְתִצְוֶהוּ עַל־מֶרְדֳּכָי לְרַעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־
 מַה־זֶּה: וַיֵּצֵא הַתֵּן אֶל־מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶל־רְחוֹב הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר

קרי: ותבאנה

reflecting her sweet character and personal beauty. When the edict of the king was announced, and his eunuchs scoured the country in search of a new wife for the monarch, Esther hid herself and remained in seclusion for four

written for every province in its own script and for every nation in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet. Letters were sent by means of couriers to all the king's provinces with orders to destroy, slay, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their property. A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in every province, and published to all the peoples, so that they might be ready for that day. The couriers rode out in haste by order of the king, and the edict was issued in Shushan the capital city. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was thrown into confusion.

IV

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he rent his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city crying loudly and bitterly. He came within the front of the king's gate, for inside the king's gate none in sackcloth was allowed to pass. Throughout all the provinces, wherever the king's command and edict arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, most of them lying in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about it, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them.

Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what the trouble was and what was the meaning of it all. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city-square in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened

years, until a divine voice urged her to make her appearance among the candidates for the queen's vacant place.

The keeper of the harem showered attention upon her, and placed at her disposal riches never given to others. But she was not tempted to use the

לפני שער־המלך: ויגדלו מרדכי את כל־אשר קרהו
 ואת פרשת הכסף אשר אמר המן לשקול על־נגנו
 המלך ביהודים לאבדם: ואת־פתשגן כתב־הדת אשר
 נתן בשושן להשמידם נתן לו להראות את־אסתר ולהגיד
 לה ולצוות עליה לבוא אל־המלך להתחנן־לו ולבקש
 מלפניו על־עמה: ויבוא התך ויגד לאסתר את דברי
 מרדכי: ותאמר אסתר להתך ותצוהו אל־מרדכי: כל
 עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך יודעים אשר כל־איש
 ואשה אשר־יבוא אל־המלך אלה־חצר הפנימית אשר
 לא־יקרא אחת דתו להמית לבד מאשר יושיט־לו המלך
 את־שרביט הזהב ויהי ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל־
 המלך זה שלשים יום: ויגידו למרדכי את דברי אסתר:
 ויאמר מרדכי להשיב אל־אסתר אל־הדמי בנפשך
 להמלט בית־המלך מכל־היהודים: כי אס־החפש
 תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יצמוד ליהודים ממקום
 אחר ואת ובית־אביך תאבדו ומי יודע אס־לעת כזאת
 הנעת למלכות: ותאמר אסתר להשיב אל־מרדכי:
 לך כגוים את־כל־היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי
 ואל־תאכלו ואל־תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גס־אני
 ונערתִי אצום בן ובתן אבוא אל־המלך אשר לא־כדת
 וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי: ויעבר מרדכי ויעש ככל אשר
 צוהה עליו אסתר:

קרי: ביהודים.

king's luxuries, nor did she eat of the king's food. Together with her seven maids she continued her modest mode of living. When her turn came to be ushered into the royal presence, the decision in her favor was at once assured. The king was very desirous of learning all about Esther's family, but Esther

to him, and all about the money that Haman had offered to pay into the royal treasury for the annihilation of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the edict which had been proclaimed in Shushan for their destruction, so that he might show it to Esther and tell her about it, bidding her to go to the king to plead with him and entreat him for her people. Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Esther told Hathach to return to Mordecai with this message: "All the king's courtiers and the people of the king's provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king's presence in the inner court unbidden, there is but one law for him: it is death, except for the person to whom the king extends the golden scepter, which means he shall live. I have not been summoned to come to the king in the past thirty days."

When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai had this answer sent to Esther: "Do not imagine you will escape inside the royal palace any more than the rest of the Jews. If you remain silent at such a time as this, relief and deliverance for the Jews will appear from some other quarter, but you and your father's household will perish. Who knows, perhaps it is for such a time as this that you have come to royal estate!"

Thereupon Esther had this answer sent to Mordecai: "Go and assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my maids will fast as you do; and so I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai went away and did exactly as Esther had ordered him.

tured the conversation in a way to leave the king's curiosity unsatisfied.

In rabbinic legend, Esther is one of the four most beautiful women ever created. She remained eternally young. When she married Ahasuerus she was at least forty years of age.

Diverse opinions have been held on the subject of the historicity of the book of Esther. Many writers maintain the narrative to be thoroughly his-

ד

ויהי ביום השלישי והלכש אסתר מלכות ותעלה בחדר
 בית-המלך הפנימי לכה בית המלך והמלך ישב על-
 כסא מלכותו בבית המלכות לכה פתח החדר: והיו
 כראות המלך את-אסתר המלכה עומת בלצר נשאר
 חן בעיניו וישב המלך לאסתר ארש-רכיט החדר אשר
 ביה ותקרב אסתר ותגע בראש השוכב: ואמר לה
 המלך מדרךך אסתר המלכה ומדפדפתך ערתי
 המלכות ונתן לך: והאמר אסתר אסתר אסתר-המלך טוב
 כוא המלך והמן היום אלה-משה ארש-עיתי לו:
 ואמר המלך מרדך ארדך קעשית אסתר אסתר
 וכה המלך והמן אלה-משה ארש-עיתך אסתר:
 ואמר המלך לאסתר במשה הין מדשאלךך ונתן
 לך ומדפדפתך ערתי המלכות והעש: ותען
 אסתר והאמר שאלתי ובקשתי: אספצתי לך בעני
 המלך ואספד-המלך טוב לכה ארש-אלתי וקעשית
 ארש-עיתי כוא המלך והמן אלה-משה ארש-עיתי
 לך וממר אעשה פרבר המלך: והא המן פנים הווא
 שמת וטוב לך וכמות המן ארש-עיתי בשער המלך
 ולא-קם ולא-ע מפני המלך: והמן על-מדרג החדר:
 והאמר המן וכה אלה-עיתו וישלח המן את-אחרי
 ואחר-ש אשתו: ותספר להם המן את-כבוד עשרו
 וכה פניו ואת פל-אשר מרד המלך ואת אשר נשאו

toral, for it refers more than once to the *chronicles* of Persia as containing a record of the events in question. The feast of Purim, with which the nar-

V

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the royal palace, facing the king's house. The king was seated on his royal throne in the royal palace opposite the entrance to the palace. When the king noticed Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king extended to Esther the golden scepter which he was holding, and Esther touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king said to her: "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Up to half the kingdom shall be given to you." Esther said: "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet which I have prepared for him." Thereupon the king commanded: "Bring Haman at once, to fulfill Esther's wish!" So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

During the wine feast the king said to Esther: "What is your petition? It shall be granted you; what is your request? Up to half my kingdom, it shall be done." But Esther replied: "My petition, my request is: If I have won the king's favor, if it please the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to a banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do the king's bidding.

That day Haman came forth glad and gratified. When, however, Haman noticed that Mordecai in the king's gate neither rose nor stirred before him, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. But Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Haman recounted to them the glory of his wealth, the abundance of his children, and how the

rative is so closely connected, has been observed by the Jewish people in all parts of the world. It is a standing memorial of the remarkable episode in Jewish history which the book records. Its lifelike representation of Persian manners and customs is borne out by the results of modern research. The

על־השָׂרִים וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמָּן אֵף לֹא־הִבִּיאָהּ
אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה:
כִּי אִם־אֹתִי וְגַם־לְמַחֵר אֲנִי קָרוֹאֶלָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ: וְכֹל־
זֶה אֵינְנִי שׂוֹה לִי בְכֹל־עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֶת־מַרְדֵּכִי
הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ: וְתֹאמַר לוֹ זָרֵשׁ אֲשֶׁנּוּ וְכֹל־
אֲהַבּוּ יַעֲשִׂי־עֵץ גְּבוּהַ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וּבִפְקֹר וַאֲמַר לַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־מַרְדֵּכִי עָלָיו וְכֹא עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה שָׂמַח
וַיִּטֵּב הַדְּבָר לִפְנֵי הֵמָן וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ:

י

בְּלִילָה הַהוּא נִדְּדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לַהֲבִיָּא אֶת־
סֵפֶר הַזְּכָרֹנוֹת דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים וַיְהִי נִקְרָאִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:
וַיִּמְצָא כְּתוּב אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיד מַרְדֵּכִי עַל־בִּנְתִּנָּא וְתָרַשׁ שְׁנֵי
סָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמַרְי הַפֶּה אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח זֶד בַּמֶּלֶךְ
אַחֲשֻׁרוּשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה יָקָר וְגִדּוּלָה
לְמַרְדֵּכִי עַל־זֶה וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו לֹא־נַעֲשֶׂה
עִמּוֹ דָּבָר: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִי בַּחֲצֹר וְהֵמָּן בָּא לַחֲצֹר
בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחִיצוֹנָה לֵאמֹר לַמֶּלֶךְ לְתִלּוֹת אֶת־מַרְדֵּכִי
עַל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּין לוֹ: וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו הִנֵּה
הֵמָּן עֹמֵד בַּחֲצֹר וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ יָבוֹא: וַיְבֹא הֵמָּן וַיֹּאמֶר
לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת בְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ
וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמָּן בְּלִבּוֹ לִמִּי יַחֲפֵץ הַמֶּלֶךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת יָקָר יוֹתֵר
מִמֶּנִּי: וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמָּן אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ
בִּיקְרוֹ: יָבִיאוּ לְבוֹשׁ מַלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לְבִשְׁבוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ

conduct of Ahasuerus is in harmony with the vain, capricious, passionate character of Xerxes. The silence of contemporary and later writings regarding

king promoted him, advancing him above the officers and royal courtiers. Then Haman said: "Queen Esther invited no one but myself to accompany the king to the banquet which she had prepared. I am invited again to come along with the king tomorrow. But all this means little to me so long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." Thereupon his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him: "Let gallows be made, fifty cubits high; speak to the king tomorrow morning, and let Mordecai be hanged on it. Then go with the king to the banquet in good spirits." This pleased Haman, and he had the gallows set up.

VI

That night, sleep left the king, so he ordered the book of annals to be brought and read aloud to him; in it was found written that Mordecai had given information about Bigthana and Teresh, the two royal eunuchs of the threshold guards, who had plotted to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. The king thereupon asked: "What honor or dignity has been conferred on Mordecai for this?" The king's courtiers attending him replied: "Nothing at all has been done for him." Then said the king: "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had entered the outer court to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had set up. The king's pages answered him: "There is Haman, standing in the court!" "Let him enter," said the king. Haman came in, and the king said to him: "What should be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman said to himself: "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me? So Haman said to the king: "As for the man whom the king delights to honor, let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and a horse on which the

the events narrated in the book of Esther is partly due to the disappearance of literature bearing on the history of Persia.

On the other hand, there are Bible scholars who object to the historicity of the book, because the story bears the appearance of a historical romance.

וסוּם אֲשֶׁר רָכַב עָלָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר נָתַן כְּתֹר מַלְכוּת
 בְּרֹאשׁוֹ: וְנָתַן הַלְבוּשׁ וְהַפֶּסֶם עַל־דֹּאִישׁ מִשְׁרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
 הַפָּרָתִימִים וְהַלְבִּשׁוּ אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ
 וְהִרְבִּיבוּ עַל־הַפֶּסֶם בְּרָחוּב הָעִיר וּקְרָאוּ לִפְנֵי בָּכָה
 יַעֲשֶׂה לָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ
 לְדָמֶן מָהֵר קַח אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַפֶּסֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ
 וַעֲשֶׂה־כֵן לְמַרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־
 תִּפְּל דָּבָר מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ: וַיִּקַּח הָמֶן אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ
 וְאֶת־הַפֶּסֶם וַיִּלְבַּשׁ אֶת־מַרְדֵּכַי וַיִּרְבִּיבוּ בְּרָחוּב הָעִיר
 וַיִּקְרָא לִפְנֵי בָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ:
 וַיֵּשֶׁב מַרְדֵּכַי אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמֶן נִדְחָה אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ אָבֵל
 וַחֲפוּי רֹאשׁ: וַיְסַפֵּר הָמֶן לְזֹרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־אֲהָבָיו
 אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָדוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֹרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם
 מִזֶּרֶע הַיְּהוּדִים מַרְדֵּכַי אֲשֶׁר הִחְלֹתָ לְנַפְּל לִפְנֵי לֹא־
 תֻּכַּל לוֹ כִּי־נִפְּוֹל תִּפּוֹל לִפְנָיו: עוֹדֶם מְדַבְּרִים עִמּוֹ
 וְסָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִגִּיעוּ וַיְבַהֲלוּ לְהִבְיֹא אֶת־דָּמֶן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה
 אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר:

ז

וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמֶן לִשְׁתּוֹת עִם־אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר
 הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר גַּם כִּיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי בַּמִּשְׁתָּה הַזֶּה מִדֵּשֶׁאֱלֹתֶיךָ
 אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְתִנָּתֶן לָךְ וּמִדֵּבִקְשֶׁתְּךָ עַד־חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת
 וְתַעֲשִׂי: וְתֵעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְתֹאמַר אִם־מִצָּאתִי הֵן

They regard a number of its features as extremely improbable; for example, the six months' feast, involving prolonged absence of the governors from their duties in the provinces; the decree for the wholesale massacre of the Jews on account of a single Jew; the issue of a subsequent decree virtually sanctioning

king has ridden, with a royal crown upon its head. Let robe and horse be entrusted to one the king's noble officers, and let him attire the man whom the king delights to honor and lead him mounted on the horse through the city square, proclaiming in front of him: "This is what is done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" Then the king said to Haman: "Get the robe and the horse at once, as you have said, and do all this for Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Omit nothing of all that you have said." So Haman took the robe and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square, proclaiming before him: "This is what is done for the man whom the king delights to honor!"

Mordecai went back to the king's gate, but Haman hurried home lamenting, with his head veiled. And when Haman recounted to his wife Zeresh and to all his friends everything that had befallen him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not get the better of him; you will ever fail and fall before him."

While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

VII

So the king and Haman came to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the banquet: "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Up to half my kingdom, it shall be done." Queen Esther replied: "If I have won your favor, O king, and if

civil war; the immense slaughter of Persians despite their superiority in numbers.

None of these objections, however, are successful in view of the ancient observance of the feast of Purim, which forms a considerable presumption in favor of its being founded on facts.

בַּעֲיֵינָךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב תִּנָּתֵן לִי נַפְשִׁי
 בְּשֹׂאֲלָתִי וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשָׁתִי: כִּי נִמְכַּרְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד
 לְהָרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד וְאֵלּוּ לְעִבְדִּים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת נִמְכַּרְנוּ הַחֲרָשִׁיתִי
 כִּי אֵין הָצָר שׁוֹה בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ
 אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה מִי הוּא זֶה וְאִי-זֶה
 הוּא אֲשֶׁר-מָלְאוּ לָבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִישׁ
 צָר וְאוֹיֵב הָמֵן הִרְעָה הַזֶּה וְהָמֵן נִבְעֵת מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וְהַמַּלְכָּה: וְהַמֶּלֶךְ קָם בְּחֻמָּתוֹ מִמִּשְׁתֵּה הַיָּין אֶל-גִּנֶּת
 הַבַּיִת וְהָמֵן עָמַד לִבְקֹשׁ עַל-נַפְשׁוֹ מֵאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה כִּי
 רָאָה כִּי-קָלְתָהּ אֵלָיו הִרְעָה מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ: וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁב
 מִגִּנֶּת הַבַּיִת אֶל-בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה הַיָּין וְהָמֵן נָפַל עַל-הַמַּטָּה
 אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ הֲגַם לִכְבוֹשׁ אֶת-
 הַמַּלְכָּה עַמִּי בְּבֵית הַדְּבָר יָצָא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּפְנֵי הָמֵן חָפוּ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר חֲרֻבוּנָה אֶחָד מִן-הַסֵּרִיסִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ גַּם הִנֵּה
 הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה הָמֵן לְמַרְדְּכָי אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-טוֹב עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
 עָמַד בְּבֵית הָמֵן גְּבוּהַ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְוּ
 עָלָיו: וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת-הָמֵן עַל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-הָכִין לְמַרְדְּכָי וַחֲמַת
 הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכְבָה:

ח

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה אֶת-
 בֵּית הָמֵן צָרַר הַיְּהוּדִים וּמַרְדְּכָי בָּא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי-
 הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר מֶה הוּא-לָּהּ: וַיָּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-טִבְעֶתוֹ

קרי: הייודים.

Ginzberg, in *The Legends of the Jews* (VI,481), cites sources on the regulations concerning the writing of the *Megillah*. It must be written in lines as though it were the Torah itself (*Megillah* 16b). The name of God is not found in the book of Esther because of the fact that God did not care to testify to

it please the king, let my life be granted me as my wish, and let my people be spared as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, slain, and exterminated. If we had been merely sold as men and female slaves, I would have kept silent. The adversary indeed is not worthy of the damage to the king.

Thereupon King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther: "Who is it? Where is the one who dared to do such a thing?" "It is a foe, an enemy," said Esther, "this wicked Haman!" Haman trembled in terror before the king and the queen. The king rose from the wine-feast in a rage and went into the palace garden, while Haman stayed to plead with Queen Esther for his life; for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banqueting house, there was Haman prostrate on the couch where Esther reclined! The king exclaimed: "Will he actually ravish the queen in my own house?" No sooner had the words left the king's mouth than Haman's face was covered with despair. One of the royal eunuchs, Harvonah, said: "Furthermore, at Haman's house the gallows is standing, fifty cubit high, which Haman has prepared for Mordecai, who has done good service to the king." "Hang him on it!" the king ordered. So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's rage calmed down.

VIII

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, enemy of the Jews. Mordecai entered the king's presence, for Esther had revealed his relationship to her. The king drew off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and

the mixed marriage between Ahasuerus and Esther. In time to come, only the Pentateuch and the book of Esther will retain their worth. Only Purim and Yom Kippur will be celebrated in time to come. Esther risked her life for her people, and as her reward a book of the Holy Scriptures bears her name.

אשר העביר מהמן ויתנה למרדכי ותשם אסתר את-
מרדכי על-בית המן: ותוסף אסתר ותדבר לפני
המלך ותפל לפני רגליו ותבקד ותתחנן-לו להעביר את-
רעת המן האנגי ואת מחשבתו אשר חשב על-היהודים:
וישט המלך לאסתר את שרביט הזהב ותקם אסתר
ותעמד לפני המלך: ותאמר אסתר-על-המלך טוב ואם-
מצאתי חן לפניו וכשר הדבר לפני המלך וטובה אני
בעיניו וכתב להשיב את-הספרים מהשבת המן בך
המדתא האנגי אשר כתב לאבר את-היהודים אשר
בכל-מדינות המלך: כי איכבה אוכל וראיתי ברעה
אשר-מצא את-עמי ואיכבה אוכל וראיתי באבדן
מולדתי: ויאמר המלך אחשוורש לאסתר המלכה
ולמרדכי היהודי הנה בית-המן נתתי לאסתר ואתו
תלו על-העץ על אשר-שלח ידו ביהודיים: ואתם
כתבו על-היהודים כטוב בעיניכם בשם המלך וחתמו
בטבעת המלך כי-כתב אשר-נכתב בשם-המלך ונחתום
בטבעת המלך אין להשיב: ויקראו ספר-המלך בעת-
ההיא בחדש השלישי הוא-חדש סיון בשלושה
ועשרים בו ויכתב בכל-אשר-צוה מרדכי אל-
היהודים ואל האחשדרפנים והפחות ושרי המדינות
אשר מהדו ועד-כוש שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה
מדינה ומדינה ככתבה ועם ועם כלשנו ואל-היהודים

It has been suggested that the names of Haman's sons are pronounced in one breath by the reader in the synagogue to indicate that they expired instantly. Their names are written in perpendicular columns to suggest that

gave it to Mordecai; and Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's house.

Once again Esther spoke before the king, falling at his feet; she wept pleading with him to avert the calamity devised by Haman the Agagite against the Jews. The king held out to Esther the golden scepter, and she rose and stood before the king, saying: "If it please the king, if I have won his favor, if the proposal seems right to your majesty, and if I am pleasing to you, let an edict be written to recall the letters which Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, wrote about the destruction of the Jews in all the king's provinces. For how can I bear to witness the calamity which threatens my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" Thereupon King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew: "I have given Haman's house to Esther, and he has been hanged on the gallows, because he laid hands on the Jews. Now you shall write any instructions you please regarding the Jews in the name of the king, and seal the writ with the signet of the king; for an order written in the name of the king and sealed with the royal signet cannot be revoked."

So the king's secretaries were summoned on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan, and a writ was drawn up in terms of Mordecai's orders, for the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the officers of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, written for every province in its own script and for every people in its

the ten men were hung on parallel cords. The phrases *אָרוּר הָמֵן* (cursed be Haman) and *בָּרוּךְ מֹרְדֵּכַי* (blessed be Mordecai) have the same numerical value, 502. This will explain the talmudic statement (Megillah 7b), that "a man should cheer himself with wine on Purim until he cannot tell the

בַּכֶּתֶב וּבְלִשׁוֹנָם: וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשׁוּרֶשׁ וַיְחַתֵּם
 בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים בְּפוֹסִים
 רֶכֶבִי הָרֶכֶשׁ הָאֲחַשְׁתָּרְנִים בְּנֵי הָרַמְכִּים: אֲשֶׁר נָתַן
 הַמֶּלֶךְ לַיהוּדִים. אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-עִיר-וָעִיר לְהַקְהֵל וּלְעֲמֹד
 עַל-נַפְשָׁם לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְגַּ וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת-כָּל-חַיִּל עִם
 וּמְדִינָהּ הַצָּרִים אֹתָם טָף וְנָשִׁים וְשָׁלָם לְבָזוּ: בְּיוֹם
 אֶחָד בְּכָל-מְדִינַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשׁוּרֶשׁ בְּשִׁלוּשָׁה עָשָׂר
 לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים-עָשָׂר הוּא-אֶחָדֶשׁ אֶדְרָ: פִּתְשָׁנָה הַכֶּתֶב
 לְהַנִּתֵן דָּת בְּכָל-מְדִינָהּ וּמְדִינָהּ גָּלוּי לְכָל-הָעַמִּים וּלְהַיּוֹת
 הַיְּהוּדִים עֲתוּדִים לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַנָּקָם מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם: הָרָצִים
 רֶכֶבִי הָרֶכֶשׁ הָאֲחַשְׁתָּרְנִים יֵצְאוּ מִבְּהֵלִים וּדְחוּפִים בְּדָבָר
 הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָדָת נִתְּנָה בְּשׁוֹשֵׁן הַבִּירָה: וּמְרַדְכִי יֵצֵא
 מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלָבוֹשׁ מַלְכוּת הַבָּלֵת וְחֹר וְעִמְרַת זָהָב
 גְּדוּלָה וְתַכְרִיף בּוֹץ וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהָעִיר שׁוֹשֵׁן צָהָלָה וְשִׁמְחָה:
 לַיהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׁמְחָה וְשִׁשָּׁן וְיָקָר: וּבְכָל-
 מְדִינָהּ וּמְדִינָהּ וּבְכָל-עִיר וָעִיר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וְדָתוֹ מִנִּיעַ שִׁמְחָה וְשִׁשָּׁן לַיהוּדִים מִשְׁתָּה יוֹם טוֹב
 וְרַבִּים מִעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ מִתִּנְהָלִים כִּי-נִפְל פִּתְחֵי-הַיְּהוּדִים
 עֲלֵיהֶם:

קרי: היהודים-צמידים.

difference between the phrases *המן* and *ברוך מרדכי*, since they seem to signify the same thing on numerical grounds. The modern Purim carnivals in Israel are called *adloyada*, a term borrowed from the talmudic passage just quoted.

According to the biblical scholar Samuel R. Driver of the nineteenth century, the sacred writer of the book of Esther is well informed on Persian manners and institutions, and commits no anachronisms. The narrative in-

own language, and for the Jews, in their script and their language. Mordecai had it written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet.

He sent the despatches by couriers mounted on fast horses from the royal stables, to the effect that the king granted permission to the Jews of every city to unite and defend themselves; if any people or province attacks them, they are permitted to destroy, slay, and annihilate its armed force along with women and children, and to plunder their possessions, in one day, in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in every province and published to all peoples, that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers, mounted on royal steeds, went out post-haste at the king's urgent command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the capital city.

Mordecai came out from the royal presence clad in royal robes of blue and white, with a large golden crown, and with a mantle of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted for joy. For the Jews, there was light and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and city, wherever the king's command an edict arrived, the Jews had joy and gladness, feasting and a festival. Many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, because fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

cludes items that were supplied to the author by tradition. Aided by his knowledge of Persian life and customs, he combined them into a consistent picture, parts of which owe their form to the author's love of dramatic effect.

Some non-Jewish Bible critics have found fault with the temper displayed in the book of Esther, asserting that it breathes a spirit of vengeance and hatred. Since, however, the Jewish people had been brought into a position of mortal danger by the irrational malice of a foe, it was both natural and right that Mordecai and Esther should do what lay in their power to extricate them from it. The king's decree authorized them to act in self-defense against any who assailed them.

ט

ובשנים עשר חודש הוא-חודש אדר בשלושה עשר יום
 בו אשר הגיע דבר-המלך ודתו להעשות ביום אשר
 שברו איבי היהודים לשלוט בהם ונהפוך הוא אשר
 ישלטו היהודים המה בשנאיהם: נקחלו היהודים
 בעריהם בכל-מדינות המלך אחשוורוש לשלח יד
 במבקשי רעתם ואיש לא-עמד בפניהם כי-נפל פחדם
 על-כל-העמים: וכל-שרי המדינות והאחשדרפנים
 והפחות ועשי המלאכה אשר למלך מנשאים את-
 היהודים כי-נפל פחד-מרדכי עליהם: כי-גדול מרדכי
 בבית המלך ושמעו הולך בכל-המדינות כי-האיש
 מרדכי הולך וגדול: ויכו היהודים בכל-איביהם מפת-
 חרב וחרג ואבדו ויעשו בשנאיהם פרצונם: ובשושן
 הבירה הרגו היהודים ואבד חמש מאות איש:

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

ואת |

עשרת

פרשנדתא

דלפון

אספתא:

פורתא

אדלגא

ארידתא:

פרמשתא

אריסי

ארידי

ויזתא:

IX

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, when the king's command and edict was to be put in force, the very day when the enemies of the Jews expected to gain the upper hand over them, the opposite occurred; the Jews gained the upper hand over their enemies. On that day the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to attack those who sought their hurt. None could hold out against them, because fear of them had fallen upon all peoples. All the officers of the provinces, the satraps and governors, and the king's officials, showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. Mordecai became a high personage in the royal palace; his fame spread throughout all the provinces; the man Mordecai grew steadily greater. So the Jews struck at their enemies with the sword, slaying and destroying; they wreaked their will upon those who hated them.

In Shushan, the capital city, the Jews killed five hundred men and destroyed them. They killed also

Parshandatha	Aridatha
Dalphon	Parmashta
Aspatha	Arisai
Poratha	Aridai
Adalia	Vaizatha

the sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews but they did not touch the plunder.

A number of apparent exaggerations, characteristic of imaginative fiction, are pointed out by some, who endeavor to disprove the historicity of the book of Esther. They regard, for example, as overstatements the 83-ft. high gallows (5:14); the 6-months' feast (1:4); a year's beauty treatment for the court maidens (2:12); the 10,000-talent gift (= some twenty million dollars) for financing the pogrom (3:9). They question: Would Haman have

בְּנֵי הַמֶּן בְּהַמְדָּתָא צִרְר הַיְּהוּדִים הָרְגוּ וּבִבְזָה לֹא
 שְׁלָחוּ אֶת־יָדָם: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפֵּר הַהֲרוּגִים בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן
 הַבֵּיתָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
 בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן הַבֵּיתָה הָרְגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאִכְר חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ
 וְאֵת עֶשְׂרֵת בְּנֵי־הַמֶּן בְּשֹׂאֵר מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ מִה עָשׂוּ
 וּמִה־שְׁאַלְתִּי וַיַּנְתֵּן לִי וּמִה־בִקְשֶׁתְּךָ עוֹד וְתַעֲשִׂי: וְהָאֹמֶר
 אֲסֹתֵר אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִנָּתֵן גַּם־מֹחַר לַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר
 בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת הַיּוֹם וְאֵת עֶשְׂרֵת בְּנֵי־הַמֶּן יִתְּלוּ
 עַל־הָעֵץ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת כֹּן וְתַנְתֵּן דָּת בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן
 וְאֵת עֶשְׂרֵת בְּנֵי־הַמֶּן תָּלוּ: וַיִּקְהֲלוּ הַיְּהוּדִיִּים אֲשֶׁר־
 בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן גַּם בַּיּוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר בִּהְרֹגוּ
 בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וּבִבְזָה לֹא שְׁלָחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:
 וּשְׂאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהָלוּ וַעֲמָד
 עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְנוֹחַ מֵאִיבֵיהֶם וְהָרוּג בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה
 וּשְׁבָעִים אָלֶף וּבִבְזָה לֹא שְׁלָחוּ אֶת־יָדָם: בַּיּוֹם־שְׁלֹשָׁה
 עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשֵׂה אֹתוֹ
 יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה: וְהַיְּהוּדִיִּים אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן נִקְהָלוּ
 בְּשְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וּבְאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְנוֹחַ בַּחֲמִשָּׁה
 עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשֵׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה: עַל־כֵּן הַיְּהוּדִים
 הַפְּרוּזִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרוּזוֹת עָשִׂים אֵת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה
 עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר שִׂמְחָה וּמְשֻׁתָּה וַיּוֹם טוֹב וּמְשַׁלַּח
 מִנּוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ: וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶת־הַיְּהוּדִים הָאֵלֶּה

קרי: היהודים. והיהודים. הפרושים.

attempted the massacre of all the Jews simply because one man defied him, and would the king have permitted it? Would Haman have fixed a date for the massacre so far ahead? Such criticism shows a strange ignorance of

That day, when the number of those killed in Shushan the capital city came to the notice of the king, the king said to Queen Esther: "In Shushan, the capital city, the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the royal provinces? What is your wish now? It shall be granted you. What else is your request? It shall be fulfilled." Esther replied: "If it please the king, let the Jews in Shushan be allowed to act tomorrow also as they did today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." The king ordered this to be done; an edict was issued. Haman's ten sons were hanged, and the Jews in Shushan gathered on the fourteenth day of the month Adar as well and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but they did not lay hands on the plunder.

The other Jews throughout the king's provinces had also mustered to defend their lives, getting relief from their enemies and killing seventy-five thousand; but they did not touch the plunder. This was on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; they rested on the fourteenth day, and made it a day of feasting and joy. The Jews in Shushan mustered on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month, and rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and joy. That is why village Jews, who live in unvalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month Adar in joy and feasting, as a festival on which they send gifts to one another.

Mordecai recorded these events, and sent letters to all the

human nature indeed. Massacres and wars have been sparked off many times through the injured pride of one or two individuals. Persian kings were easily swayed by their favorites.

Haman is depicted as a thoroughly superstitious man, and the day of the massacre was chosen because the casting of lots indicated that it would be a lucky day (3:7). The gallows 83 feet high would be the typically extra-

וַיִּשְׁלַח סָפְרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינוֹת
 הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁר־יֹשֵׁב הַקְּרוּבִים וְהָרְחוֹקִים: לֵקֶם עֲלֵיהֶם
 לַחַיֹּת עֲשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וְאֶת
 יוֹם־חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה: בְּיָמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחַז
 בָּהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן
 לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֵכָל לַיּוֹם טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מִשְׁתָּה
 וְשִׂמְחָה וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְּנוֹת לְאֶבְיָנִים:
 וְקָבַל הַיְּהוּדִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הִחֲלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־כָּתַב
 מָרְדֳּכָי אֲלֵיהֶם: כִּי הָמָן בְּדַהֲמָתָא הָאֲנִי צָרָר כָּל־
 הַיְּהוּדִים חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים לְאַבְדָּם וְהַפֵּל פּוֹר הוּא
 הַגּוֹרֵל לְהָמָם וּלְאַבְדָּם: וּבְכֹאֵה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אָמַר עִם־
 הַסֵּפֶר יָשׁוּב מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים
 עַל־דְּרָאֻשׁוֹ וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־כִּנּוֹ עַל־הָעֵץ: עַל־כֵּן קָרָא
 לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוֹר עַל־כֵּן עַל־כֵּן לְדַבְּרֵי
 הָאֲנִיחָה הַזֹּאת וּמִהֲדָאוּ עַל־כֵּכָה וּמָה הִנֵּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם:
 קִיָּמוּ וְקָבַל הַיְּהוּדִים אֶל־הֶם וְעַל־זֶרַעַם וְעַל כָּל־
 הַגְּלוּיִם עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר לַחַיֹּת עֲשִׂים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים
 הָאֵלֶּה בְּכַתְּבָם וּבְזִמְנָם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה: וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
 נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה מְדִינָה
 וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר וְעִיר וַיְמִי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ
 הַיְּהוּדִים וְזָכָרָם לֹא־יִסּוּף מִזֶּרַעַם: וְתָתַב
 אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בַת־אֲבִיתָיִל וּמָרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי אֶת־כָּל־

קרי: וקבלי

vagant display of a thwarted man in power. The king was made to understand that a large proportion of Jewish property would be put in the royal treasuries.

Jews in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, far and near, charging them to keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar, year by year, as the days on which the Jews obtained relief from their enemies and as the month which was changed for them from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity. They were to keep them as days of feasting and joy, days for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor. The Jews undertook to continue the practice that they had begun and what Mordecai prescribed for them.

For Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews and had cast *pur*, that is the lot, to crush and destroy them. But when Esther appeared before the king, he commanded by means of letters that the wicked plot devised by Haman against the Jews should recoil on his own head. So they hanged him and his sons on the gallows. On account of that, these days were named *Purim*, from the word *pur*.

Therefore, in view of all the details in this letter, and of what they had seen and experienced in that affair, the Jews confirmed and obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days without fail in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year. These days should be remembered and observed in each generation, family, province, and city. These days of *Purim* shall never cease among the Jews; the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.

Queen Esther, the daughter of Avihail, wrote a second letter

Various techniques are employed in the book of Esther in order to achieve the greatest vividness and power of expression. The most ingenious of these is the construction of the plot upon the ancient blood feud between Amalek and Israel, inherited by Haman the Agagite and Mordecai the Jew. The "unlucky thirteenth" turns out to be unlucky for the opponent of the Jewish people. The main literary feature, that of a woman whose beauty

תִּקְוָה לָקֵץ אֶת־אֲנֵרַת הַפָּרִים הַזֹּאת הַשְּׁנִית: וַיִּשְׁלַח
סָפְרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֶל־שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמָאָה מְדִינָה
מַלְכוּת אַחֲשֵׁרֹשׁ דְּבָרֵי שָׁלוֹם וְאַמֶּת: לָקֵץ אֶת־יְמֵי
הַפָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּזִמְנֵיהֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר קָם עֲלֵיהֶם מֶרְדֵּכִי הַיְּהוּדִי
וְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְכֹאֲשֶׁר קָמוּ עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְעַל־זֶרְעָם דְּבָרֵי
הַצּוּמֹת וְוַעֲקָתָם: וּמֵאֵמֶר אֶסְתֵּר קָם דְּבָרֵי הַפָּרִים
הָאֵלֶּה וְנִכְתָּב בַּסֵּפֶר:

וַיֵּשֶׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרֹשׁ מִסָּעֵי עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֵין הָיָם: וְכָל־
מַעֲשֵׂה תִקְוָה וְנִבְרָתוֹ וּפְרָשֵׁת נִדְלָת מֶרְדֵּכִי אֲשֶׁר נִדְּלוּ
הַמֶּלֶךְ הַלְוֹאֲתָם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לַמֶּלֶכִּי
מֶרְדֵּכִי וּפָרַס: כִּי מֶרְדֵּכִי הַיְּהוּדִי מִשְׁנֵה לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרֹשׁ
וְנִדְּלוּ לַיְּהוּדִים וְרָצִי לְרֹב אֶחָיו דָּרַשׁ טוֹב לַעֲמֹד וְדָבַר
שָׁלוֹם לְכָל־זֶרְעוֹ:

קרי: אַחֲשֵׁרֹשׁ.

captures the heart of the enemy and thereby saves her people from destruction, is found likewise in the apocryphal book of Judith, dating either from the Persian or Hasmonean period. It was written to encourage the Jewish people in their struggle for liberty.

The principal Persian words to be found in the book of Esther are: **סַרְתָּמִים** (nobles, chieftains); **כִּרְמִס** (fine linen); **פִּתְוִם** (decree); **אַחֲשֵׁרִיפִים** (snares); **פִּתְוִם** and **פִּתְוִם** (a copy); **רִמָּיִם** (mares); **אַחֲשֵׁרִיפִים** (messengers). No Persian word resembling the name *Purim* (lots) has been found by scholars. However, the form *Purim* is supported by the tradition of the feast itself.

of Purim, confirming explicitly the message of Mordecai the Jew. Letters were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahasuerus, in terms of peace and truth. These days of Purim shall be kept at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their descendants, for fasting and praying. Esther's command confirmed these regulations for Purim, and the record was preserved in a book.

X

King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the mainland and on the islands of the sea. All the acts of his power and the full account of the authority to which the king promoted Mordecai, are recorded in the royal annals of Media and Persia. For Mordecai the Jew ranked second to King Ahasuerus; he was a great man among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and spoke peace on behalf of all their children.

The book of Esther does not prescribe any religious service for Purim: it enjoins only the annual celebration of the feast on the 14th and 15th of Adar. Some writers have therefore suggested that the observance of Purim was at first merely of a convivial and social nature. The merrymaking, feasting and masquerading, characteristic of Purim, have served a much needed relief from the serious life led during the greater part of the year.

The following seven *mitzvot* are prescribed for Purim in the special talmudic tractate named *Megillah*: 1) *Megillah* reading in the synagogue at the beginning of the Purim festival in connection with the evening service, and again during the morning service; 2) exchange of gifts; 3) distribution of charity; 4) Torah reading; 5) recital of *Al ha-Nissim* in the *Shemoneh Esreh* and in the *Grace* after meals; the festive meal of Purim (סעודת פורים); 7) restraint of all mourning or fasting.

The *Hallel*, however, is not chanted on Purim because, unlike Hanukkah, the miracle of Purim occurred outside Eretz Yisrael. The festive meal of Purim, reminiscent of Esther's banquet, is begun in the afternoon and carried on well into the night. The day succeeding the 14th of Adar is regarded as a minor holiday, called *Shushan Purim*, the day when the Jews of Shushan celebrated their triumph.

The custom of masquerading on Purim was first introduced among the Italian Jews during the fifteenth century under the influence of the Roman carnival. Rabbi Moses Isserles (רמ"א) expresses the opinion that, since the purpose of masquerade is only merrymaking, it should not be considered a transgression of the biblical law regarding dress (אורח חיים רצ"ז, יב).